SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

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CR Consumer Reports®

JANUARY + FEBRUARY 2025

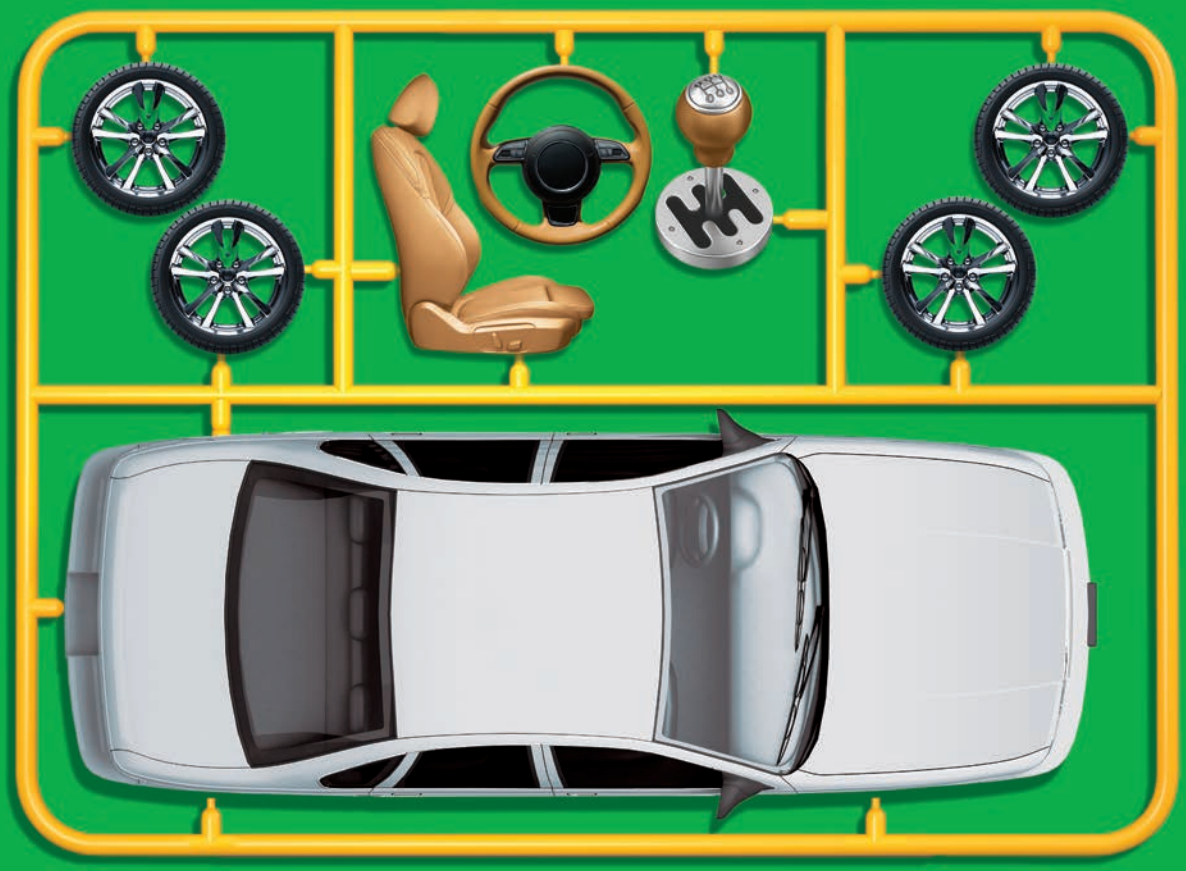
694 PRODUCTS RATED & REVIEWED

OUR GUIDE TO

NATURAL CURES

Melatonin for better sleep. Zinc for a cold. Acupuncture for back pain. Here's what really works—and what doesn't.

Put Together a Great Deal ...



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WORSE — BETTER

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With Gratitude

AS I PREPARE to step down after 10 wonderful years leading CR, I want to take a moment to reflect on how far we've come—and where consumers stand today.

In many ways, the marketplace is unrecognizable compared with when I joined CR's remarkable team. The digital world has evolved at a breakneck pace, altering nearly every aspect of our daily lives. Consumer threats have evolved, too. A handful of digital platforms exert unprecedented control over what we see, the information we encounter is muddled like never before, and innovation arrives faster than our ability to create responsible consumer protections around it.

Given the scale of change we're grappling with, there has never been a more vital moment to recognize the power we have as consumers. Because it isn't only the threats we face that are unprecedented—so too are our opportunities to shape the marketplace for the better.

Over the past decade, CR has sought to help people seize those opportunities. We've pioneered the testing of digital products and piloted ethical AI tools to help you navigate the digital world with confidence. We've created a race to the top for auto safety and secured new rules to make our food, homes, and families safer. We've introduced CR to earn the trust of a new generation and modernized how we deliver on our mission. Everything we do is about equipping you to exercise your consumer power—the power you use every time you make a choice or raise your voice in the marketplace.

As I step down from CR, I look forward to cheering on this iconic organization's next chapter and seeing all the ways our members will assert their power in the years ahead. Thank you for taking this journey with me and for making everything we've achieved together possible.

Marta Tellado

Marta L. Tellado,
President and CEO
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PHOTO: VICTORIA WILL

Preventing Tragic Tip-Overs

CR fought long and hard alongside parent advocates to reduce the risk of furniture tip-overs, which have caused hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries of children over the past two decades. Finally, in 2022, the Stop Tip-overs of Unstable, Risky Dressers on Youth (or STURDY) Act was passed.

Now, more than a year after the law went into effect, a CR investigation has found that the new safety standards are clearly working—but there's still reason for concern.

First the good news: We put 12 popular dresser models through our rigorous tip-over tests, which are based on the requirements of the STURDY Act. All those manufactured after the rule went into effect on Sept. 1, 2023, passed.

But there's still work to be done. The rule applies only to dressers manufactured after that date and allows companies to continue selling older ones. Our investigation found that dressers made before the law went into effect are still being sold on major retail platforms like Amazon and Walmart, potentially putting consumers at risk. Seven of the 19 dressers we bought for our tests in early 2024 were manufactured before the new standards went into effect. (We returned them untested.)

Most important: We found that it's not easy for consumers to learn when a dresser was made. This info isn't readily available on the products or online, so consumers must contact manufacturers directly. CR asks retailers to commit to a public timeline for ending sales of older, non-compliant designs. And we're urging manufacturers to clarify if their dressers meet the new standards.

100%

of dressers produced after Sept. 1, 2023, and evaluated by CR passed our tip-over tests.

SOURCE: CONSUMER REPORTS

ACTION UPDATE

Consumers rely heavily on online reviews to help them make purchasing decisions. Unfortunately—as CR has often noted—online marketplaces are rife with fake reviews that are paid for or planted by those who stand to benefit from sales. And fake reviews generated by artificial intelligence are making the problem far worse. In August, the Federal Trade Commission passed a CR-endorsed rule prohibiting fake reviews and testimonials, the censoring of honest negative reviews, and paying third parties for positive reviews. The new rule took effect in October.

Making Autos Safer

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Most everyone is a pedestrian at some point–whether we're crossing a busy street or walking along a rural road–and we all want to get around safely. But between 2009 and 2022, the annual number of pedestrian deaths shot up 83 percent, to 7,522. And that doesn't include "frontovers," where a driver hits someone–usually a child–in their front blind spot while maneuvering in a driveway or parking lot.

The reasons for this are complex. But research indicates that vehicle design is likely a contributing factor.

WHAT CR IS DOING ABOUT IT

CR has closely documented the trends of growing size, weight, and hood height of the biggest SUVs and trucks. And we've been pushing automakers to consider safer vehicle designs that would make pedestrians more visible and collisions less deadly when they do occur, and to make features like pedestrian detection and frontover-prevention technology standard on all models.

We've also urged policymakers to help–and in September, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration proposed a rule requiring that new vehicles be designed to reduce pedestrian head injuries. It calls for, among other things, test procedures that would simulate pedestrian impacts, and requirements that would align with those already in place in Europe and Asia.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Make sure your vehicle has good visibility and is equipped with automatic emergency braking with pedestrian detection. And join CR in calling for sensible safety upgrades to make crashes more survivable for pedestrians. Sign our petition at **CR.org/safepedestrians**.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN RITTER

THE
SAFEST CARS
YOU CAN BUY RIGHT NOW
GET RID OF BAD SMELLS FAST
THE BEST WAY TO GUARD YOUR NEST EGG
SEE YOUR DOCTOR WITHOUT WAITING
CR Consumer Reports
OCTOBER 2024
THE SAFEST CARS YOU CAN BUY
These vehicles (plus more inside) have all the features that will protect you on the road.

Our October 2024 cover story, **"The Safest Cars You Can Buy Right Now,"** listed CR's expert picks for top-rated models that offer the best protection on the road. Readers shared their thoughts about that story and other October features. Read our responses here.

I NOTICED that there are no Subaru models listed in any of the categories in the article [midsized cars, SUVs, etc.]. I was under the impression that Subaru vehicles were very safe. Should I be concerned about the 2025 Forester Premium that we just purchased?
–Chris Kniest, St. Louis

EDITOR'S NOTE *Great question–and it's one many other readers have asked. Our list consisted of vehicles that performed well in crash protection, included effective crash avoidance systems as standard equipment, and excelled in our track testing for crash avoidance. For the 2024 model year, most Subaru models lacked blind spot warning and rear cross traffic warning as standard on all trims. Both remain optional on the Forester for the 2025 model year. Yours may have those systems if you purchased a package that includes them. (Check your window sticker, if you still have it, or look for the yellow warning light on your side-view mirrors when passing another vehicle.) We do consider the Subaru Forester a safe vehicle but withheld the "safest" badge from the model as a whole because we think that important safety features should always come as standard equipment.*

WRITE

Go to CR.org/lettertoeditor to share your comments for publication.

YOU NOTE in the article that a Mitsubishi Mirage "weighs just 2,084 pounds." How heavy does CR think a vehicle should be to be safe?
–Michael C. Mott, Mansfield, OH

EDITOR'S NOTE *Based on our insights and analysis by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, CR recommends buying a car with a curb weight over 2,750 pounds. In a crash with another vehicle, a heavier model will provide greater protection for you and other occupants. This weight requirement eliminates the smallest vehicles from our "safest" list.*

I WAS PLEASED to read your report on the safest cars. My Prius made both lists. I found that your analysis verifies my experience. I tell friends I've got a new computer: It's got four wheels and bucket seats. The safety beeps have helped me change lanes, park better, and avoid unrecognized dangers. My one complaint has to do with the noise it makes when I shift into reverse. It's a terribly loud and screeching signal that can wake the neighbors and my wife. I have to back into my driveway each night so I can sneak out of my cul-de-sac without waking everyone up the next day. Why couldn't Toyota have used a more pleasant BEEP, BEEP, BEEP like the backup warnings on most trucks?
–Frank Miller, Captain Cook, HI

DISHWASHER STRATEGIES

REGARDING "Reduce Your Water Bill" in the October Insights section: Every time I see advice about not rinsing dishes [before putting them in the dishwasher] and washing only full loads, I say "Fine–but what if someone lives alone and doesn't do fancy cooking?" By not rinsing and having to wait a week in order to get a full load, the dishwasher can get pretty stinky and germy.
–Roger Morschhauser, Fort Collins, CO

EDITOR'S NOTE *That's true–you wouldn't want to leave unrinsed dishes in a dishwasher for very long. Larry Ciufo, CR's chief dishwasher expert, suggests using the rinse/hold feature. "Most dishwashers now have this setting," he says. "The cycle will quickly rinse off your dishes and you can then wait until a full load is ready to run."*

THE SUGAR IN FRUIT JUICE

THE OCTOBER ARTICLE "Sugar Substitutes Are Everywhere" made me wonder about something. I like sweet drinks, and I was comparing 100% apple juice to Coca-Cola. Apple juice: 114 calories, 23.84 grams sugar, 0 grams added sugar (for an 8-ounce serving). Coke: 96 calories, 26 grams sugar, all from added sugar (from a 12-ounce-can label, adjusted for 8 ounces). I think I read that added sugars are bad but that natural sugars are good. Is apple juice a healthier choice?
–Tim Friedlander, Long Beach, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE *Soda and fruit juice do have similar amounts of calories and sugar. Although the sugar in soft drinks is added and the sugar in fruit juice comes naturally from the fruit, your body doesn't metabolize it any differently. Still, fruit juice (in moderation) is the better pick because it also contains some vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, which soda doesn't. Multiple studies show that frequent consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages may raise the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and other conditions. The research on fruit juice is more mixed, with some studies suggesting it can protect health. If you like fruit juice, a small glass a day–less than 8 ounces–is fine. But whole fruit is best because it has less sugar and fewer calories than juice and contains fiber, which has a positive effect on how the body processes sugars and helps keep you full.*

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FASTER MEDICAL CARE

"HOW TO SKIP THOSE LINES" in the October issue lists solutions that may reduce the wait time to see a doctor. Not mentioned was using a concierge doctor. They're not accessible to everyone because they require extra fees. However, patients served by concierge doctors can often obtain a same-day or next-day appointment, and the physician is able to spend more time with them due to fewer patients.
–Jonathan House, Fort Worth, TX

EDITOR'S NOTE *Thanks for the good suggestion. As you correctly point out, concierge practices are typically small, which allows the doctors to provide more personalized attention with less waiting time for appointments and responses. You're also right that concierge doctors usually cost more. These practices charge an annual membership fee, typically $1,500 to $4,000, according to Adam A. Leive, an assistant professor of public policy at the Goldman School of Public Policy at the University of California, Berkeley. And you'll need to maintain your insurance to pay for care that falls outside the practice's covered services. In addition, concierge doctors aren't available everywhere and are more likely to be primary care providers, not specialists.*

GETTING RID OF AN OLD FIRE EXTINGUISHER

Regarding "Put Out a Fire—Fast" in the October issue: I've had a fire extinguisher in my kitchen for as long as I can remember. How do I dispose of one that's expired?
—Dale Sena, Tampa, FL

EDITOR'S NOTE
In Westchester County, N.Y., where CR is based, the Household Material Recovery Facility accepts fire extinguishers for disposal. Check with your local Department of Public Works for disposal sites. If there's no facility near you, depressurize the unit by discharging the contents safely (outdoors and away from people, being careful not to breathe in the dust). Let it sit until you're sure it's depressurized, then put it out with your trash. Or check with your local recycling center to see whether you can recycle the empty shell.

STINK REMOVAL

I READ "Getting Rid of Bad Smells" in the October issue and would like more information on products for dealing with cat urine specifically. The smell is very persistent. I have been a cat owner my entire life, and I have tried many products.
–Elizabeth Hamilton, Santa Fe, NM

EDITOR'S NOTE *The cleaning experts and scientists we consulted for the article recommend enzymatic cleaners. We mentioned Nature's Miracle, but there are others. Just look for the word "enzyme" on the label. The enzymes break down the stinky uric acid in cat urine. The Humane Society of America also suggests these steps for washable items: Add a 1-pound box of baking soda to your regular detergent and wash the items as usual, air-drying if possible. If you can still smell the urine, wash them again with an enzymatic detergent (like the CR Recommended Tide Plus Ultra Oxi with Odor Eliminators) to remove the remaining smell.*

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON SCHNEIDER

What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.

Air Fryers

WE TESTED: 77 models
WE TEST FOR: How quietly a model operates and how easy it is to use and clean. We also measure the basket to indicate how much food it can cook in a single batch.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 70
Range: 47-81

TOPS AMONG LARGER FRYERS
Tabitha Brown for Target 8 Qt. Digital
$70

79 OVERALL SCORE

QUIET & COLORFUL
Pioneer Woman PW6136170192004 (6.3 Qt.)
$80

78 OVERALL SCORE

EASY-TO-USE CONTROLS
Nuwave Brio Plus 37401 (8 Qt.)
$130

78 OVERALL SCORE

Humidifiers

WE TESTED: 81 models
WE TEST FOR: The model's daily output, the amount of noise it makes, how easy it is to use, how energy-efficient it is, and how well the unit works with hard water.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 75
Range: 26-95

BEST PORTABLE MODEL
Lasko UH150
$20

93 OVERALL SCORE

BEST MIDSIZED MODEL
Honeywell HUL430B
$74

92 OVERALL SCORE

BEST LARGE MODEL
Levoit Classic 300S
$70

83 OVERALL SCORE

Ask Our Experts

How often do I need to clean my humidifier—and what's the best way to do it?

WE RECOMMEND RINSING, drying, and then refilling your humidifier's tank with fresh water every day. If you don't, it can breed and spread contaminants like mold spores into the air. Also, give it a weekly deep cleaning. To do this, pour 1 cup of distilled white vinegar into the tank. Let it soak for 20 minutes, swishing occasionally. Then rinse the tank with water until the vinegar smell is gone. Scrub the base with a toothbrush dipped in vinegar, and then rinse with water. Towel everything dry. (We don't advise using bleach; it can degrade the plastics that keep your unit watertight.) Finally, never mix vinegar and bleach to clean: It can create chlorine gas, which can damage your lungs.

ILLUSTRATION: JOSEPH CARRINGTON

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to **CR.org.**

Woks

WE TESTED: 10 models
WE TEST FOR: How quickly the wok heats up, how evenly it cooks a stir-fry, how easy it is to use and clean, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 85
Range: 73-93

EXCELLENT OVERALL
Babish 14" Carbon Steel Wok
$50

93 OVERALL SCORE

SMALLER & COMES WITH A LID
Kaqinu 12.6" Carbon Steel Wok
$45

92 OVERALL SCORE

NICE PRICE BUT SLOWER TO HEAT UP
Kenmore 14" Carbon Steel Wok
$30

86 OVERALL SCORE

Pillows

WE TESTED: 50 models
WE TEST FOR: Whether the pillow maintains its shape after extended use and supports side and back sleepers, how well it dissipates moisture, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 66
Range: 52-90

PERFECT FOR SIDE SLEEPERS
Sleep Number ComfortFit Ultimate
$140

88 OVERALL SCORE

VERY DURABLE
Nectar Tri-Comfort Cooling
$130

85 OVERALL SCORE

BARGAIN BUY
StyleWell (Home Depot) Cooling Memory Foam
$30

82 OVERALL SCORE

Color Laser Printers

WE TESTED: 16 models
WE TEST FOR: Speed and quality of printing graphics and text in color, annual ink costs, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 70
Range: 57-79

SPEEDY & TOP-QUALITY TEXT
Brother HL-L8245CDW
$370

79 OVERALL SCORE

GREAT FOR PRINTED GRAPHICS
Xerox C310/DNI
$370

73 OVERALL SCORE

MADE BY A RELIABLE BRAND
HP Color LaserJet Pro 3201dw
$300

67 OVERALL SCORE

Microwave Ovens

WE TESTED: 25 large countertop models
WE TEST FOR: How quickly and evenly a model can heat a cold dish, how quiet it is, how intuitive the controls are to use, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 68
Range: 46-82

TOP PERFORMER
LG NeoChef MSER1590S
$185

82 OVERALL SCORE

HIGH OWNER SATISFACTION
Panasonic NN-SE785S
$370

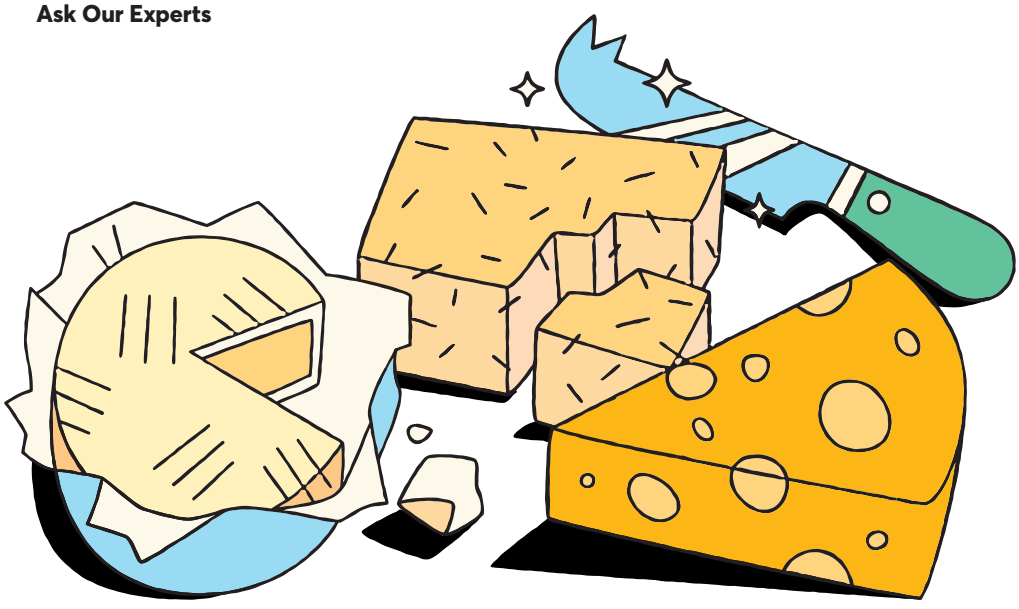
79 OVERALL SCORE

EASIEST TO USE
GE Profile JES2251SJ
$315

75 OVERALL SCORE

Note: *We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with another.*

COMING NEXT MONTH Headphones & More



How can I keep cheese from getting moldy?

THE RIGHT STORAGE is the key to preventing mold and keeping cheese fresher longer. Hard cheese like cheddar and Parmesan last the longest (about three to four weeks after opening) because of their lower moisture content, making them less susceptible to spoilage. Soft cheese like Brie or ricotta spoils faster and should be consumed within one to two weeks once opened. Cheese should be stored at about 37° F in your fridge in a crisper or dedicated cheese drawer. Once you've broken the original vacuum-sealed packaging, some experts recommend wrapping the cheese in waxed paper or parchment paper instead of plastic wrap, particularly for higher moisture, softer cheese. This will allow it to breathe without it getting dried out. Putting it in an airtight container is also a great option for soft cheese. For longer storage, hard or shredded cheese can be frozen for up to six months, but the texture after freezing will be better for cooking than for snacking. Soft cheese can also be frozen but might not fare as well.

If you spot mold on a hard cheese, you can safely cut it away as long as you remove at least 1 inch around and below the edge of the mold. Moldy soft cheese should be discarded because it spreads more easily through it.

LEARN

We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at CR.org/askourexperts ... and watch for the answers.

I just got a letter saying that information associated with my credit card may have been stolen in a data breach. What should I do?

FIRST, TRY TO LEARN what information was exposed. The severity of data breaches varies, but the most alarming cases can include exposing passwords, phone numbers, home addresses, and financial data. The letter you received may tell you or list a web address or phone number for more info. You can also go to haveibeenpwned.com, a website where you can enter your email address to see whether it appears in any of the data breaches the site tracks.

If your password was compromised, it's important to change it on the breached service and everywhere else you've used it. That's because criminals can try to log on to other services using the same information, an attack known as credential stuffing. (That's why you should never reuse passwords.) Whenever possible, also use multifactor authentication.

Then do a web search for your name to see what information comes up. If you learn, for example, that some of your data has been posted on social media, ask to have it removed. If your Social Security number or financial information was leaked, freezing your credit will restrict access to it, making it harder for identity thieves to open new accounts in your name. To do this, contact each of the three major credit bureaus (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion). You'll have to temporarily lift the freeze when you need to, as you will when applying for a credit card. For more advice from CR experts on how to protect your data online, go to our website SecurityPlanner.org.

Should I be worried about a cut that isn't healing quickly?

AS WE GET OLDER, it's normal for broken skin to take longer to heal, but if you don't see progress after two weeks, head to your doctor. Similarly, if your wound is large (more than 2x2 inches) or deep, go to an urgent care clinic or call your doctor. If you're at all unsure or if your wound is swollen, red, or painful, at the very least send the doctor a photo.

Skin becomes thinner and less elastic over time, says Peter Abadir, MD, an associate professor of geriatrics at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Sun damage exacerbates the problem, which is why the skin on your arms and hands (which are routinely exposed to sunlight) is particularly delicate.

Deficiencies in vitamins C, D, and zinc can also slow healing. And anti-inflammatory drugs, including steroids and pain relievers like ibuprofen, can reduce the speed of recovery. Blood thinners may slow recovery, too. But never stop taking any drug without first consulting your doctor.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOSEPH CARRINGTON

IN THE KNOW

What Cleans Dishes Best?

The brand of dish soap that you use can make all the difference between easy cleanups and long scrubbing sessions. We put 10 well-known dish soaps to the test to find out which ones get things squeaky clean. We caked dishes in ketchup and chicken tikka masala, then washed them in warm water with each product, using a new sponge each time. The winners had long-lasting suds and also didn't leave hands feeling chapped.

PHOTO: GREGORY REID. PROP STYLING BY MEGUMI EMOTO

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Dawn Ultra Dishwashing Liquid (Original Scent)

19¢ per ounce

Dawn's formula easily handled the mess on our plates. The suds were plentiful and thick, and even after all eight plates were clean, there were still plenty of suds left for more.

CLEANS WELL WITH A LOVELY SCENT

Mrs. Meyer's Clean Day Dish Soap (Basil Scent)

31¢ per ounce

The basil scent of this soap is light and herbaceous. Like Dawn, it produced rich suds. After washing all the dishes, there were still enough suds left to clean more plates.

THE SUPER SUDSER

Palmolive Ultra Oxy Power

12¢ per ounce

This light and clean-smelling soap produced long-lasting suds that cleaned our dishes well, but after a full round of washing, it left testers' hands a little drier than the other top soaps we tried.

GOOD VALUE

Gain Ultra Clean

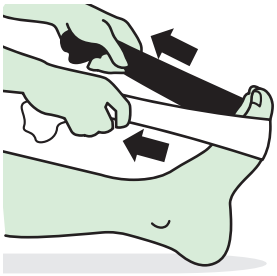
8¢ per ounce

For less than a third of the cost per ounce of the Mrs. Meyer's bottle, Gain's soap was a solid performer. During washing, it retained a nice level of suds, but the scent may be too strong for some.

HEALTH UPDATE

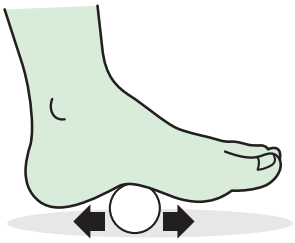
3 Ways to Stop Heel Pain

If your heels hurt, you could have plantar fasciitis or Achilles tendinitis. The first is caused by excess pressure on the plantar fascia, which is a band of tissue that attaches the heel bone to the toes, and the second is caused by overuse of the Achilles tendon, which connects calf muscles to the heel bone. Both can make your heels hurt after exercise or after you first stand up after a long rest (like when you get out of bed in the morning). Another cause of achy heels is the thinning of the protective fat pad on the bottom of your foot, which can happen as we age. To get some relief, try these strategies—but if your heel pain hasn't subsided after two weeks of self-care, it's time to see a podiatrist.



Try Stretches That Soothe

Stretching the calf and Achilles tendon a few times each day can help alleviate both Achilles tendinitis and planter fasciitis. Because pain can be worse first thing in the morning, do this stretch before you get out of bed: Place a towel, belt, or strap around the ball of the foot. With your leg straight, gently pull your toes toward you and hold for 15 seconds.



Rub Away Pain

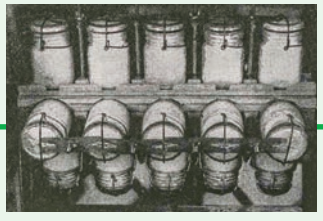
To ease pain caused by plantar fasciitis, roll a ball (a golf ball is the perfect size for this) up and down the arch of the foot and along the sides to loosen the tight tissues. Rolling a frozen water bottle under your foot's arch for 10 to 15 minutes a few times throughout the day will also relieve discomfort.

Upgrade Your Footwear

Skip going barefoot, even around the house, and choose footwear that has some cushioning, a slightly raised heel, a wide toe box, and a deep heel cup that hugs your heel and helps stabilize the foot. To make shoes more comfortable, try inserting drugstore cushioning insoles with good arch support.

ILLUSTRATIONS: RODRIGO DAMATI. PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS (12); MANUFACTURERS (5)

CR Time Traveler LAUNDRY



1940 We test 44 laundry soaps to see which cleans clothes best. No one brand stands out, so we recommend buying the least pricey detergent.

1959 CR is impressed with the $400 Norge washing machine, which offers five different types of settings, including for temperature and spin cycle.

1967 We test 36 irons that spray clothes with both water and steam (and that cost up to $3 more than steam-only irons). Our verdict? They're worth the extra money.

1971 Many laundry detergents use phosphates that pollute American waterways. We ask roughly 300 families to test non-phosphate products, and we learn that those cleansers work just as well as ones with phosphates.

1989 Our lab finds that dryers with moisture sensors (like this top-rated Whirlpool) dry better than those with only temperature sensors.

For more top-rated washers, dryers, and detergents, turn to page 74.

CR DEAL FINDER

Brrr! Warm Up With These Hot Winter Deals.

Enjoy discounts—exclusive to CR readers—on some of our favorite products.

A TOASTY DUVET

Buffy Cloud Comforter
$195

The top pick from our review, this comforter has a pillowy filling made from recycled plastic that shouldn't clump—and it keeps you toasty.

CR SAVINGS!
25% OFF
USE CODE
CRBuff25
ON BUFFY.CO

90
OVERALL SCORE

HOT DRINKS ON THE GO

S'well 16oz Traveler
$35

This S'well insulated travel mug earned a top rating in our tests, keeping drinks hot for more than 11 hours. It also feels great in your hand.

CR SAVINGS!
30% OFF
USE CODE
CONSUMERREPORTS
ON SWELL.COM[1]

EXTRA THICK TOWELS

Brooklinen Super-Plush Turkish Cotton Bath Towels
$71 for two

These huge, soft towels were the most absorbent in our evaluation. They are a good choice for bundling up in after a shower on cold days.

CR SAVINGS!
20% OFF
USE CODE
CRPLUSH20
ON BROOKLINEN.COM[2]

5/5
USABILITY

A WARM SEAT

Brondell Swash 1000
$600

This bidet attachment offers real cold-weather comfort: It has a heated seat, a warm water spray nozzle, and a warm air dryer—all controlled by remote.

CR SAVINGS!
20% OFF
USE CODE
CRBrondell20
ON BRONDELL.COM

WRAPS FOR WET HAIR

Turbie Twist Microfiber Hair Towels
$20 for two

The small towels shown here keep wet hair off your neck, and the towels shortened blow-drying times in our evaluation.

CR SAVINGS!
20% OFF
USE CODE
CRTurbie20
ON TURBIETWIST.COM

[1] On swell.com the code is valid through 1/31/25 and applies to S'well hydration products and accessories. [2] On brooklinen.com the code does not apply to Last Call items or collaborations.
Note: All discounts, except swell.com, are valid through 1/12/25. Offers do not stack with other discounts and are limited to one use per customer.

1993 We test two popular mail-order stain removers. Both work better than supermarket stain removers on tough stains like red wine.

2010 Our laundry experts explain that even though front-load washing machines have longer cycle times than top-loaders, they're more water-efficient, using about 10 gallons less per load on average.

2015 We warn consumers that brightly colored laundry detergent pods can be a serious health hazard for young children, who might easily mistake them for candy.

2020 We rate Tide and Persil as the best laundry detergents, reporting that they work equally well on tough stains such as chocolate, coffee, blood, and grass.

2025 We still test hundreds of washers and dryers to find the very best performing models, like this top-rated pair from LG.

LG WM6500HWA & DLEX6500W
$2,600

84
OVERALL SCORE

WORSE — BETTER

FOOD SAFETY UPDATE

Is Cinnamon Safe to Eat?

Our tests found concerning amounts of lead in 12 popular brands

We sprinkle cinnamon on lattes and oatmeal, bake it into pies, and even add it to chili. So CR's team of food safety scientists were alarmed when the Food and Drug Administration recently warned consumers to avoid 17 ground cinnamon products because they contained over 2 parts per million of lead—enough to pose a health threat. We decided to test 36 other cinnamon products. Our results were also concerning: Twelve of the 36 products we tested measured above 1 part per million (ppm) of lead. What this means: If you ingest just a quarter teaspoon of one of the brands on our "Don't Use" list (below), you'll be taking in more lead than you should eat in an entire day. While lead exposure in children can be particularly dangerous, causing damage to their developing brains, frequent lead exposure in adults has been linked to immune system suppression, hypertension, and kidney damage.

If you use cinnamon frequently, steer clear of the spices below and instead choose one of the six "Best to Use" brands, at right, because their lead levels are close to 0 ppm. You can have over a teaspoon of these every day—in some cases even more than that.

Don't Use These Spices

They contain more than 1 ppm of lead

Paras*
Cinnamon Powder

EGN*
Cinnamon Powder

Mimi's Products
Ground Cinnamon

Bowl & Basket
Ground Cinnamon

Rani Brand
Ground Cinnamon

Zara Foods
Cinnamon Powder

Three Rivers
Cinnamon Stick Powder

Yu Yee Brand
Five Spice Powder

BaiLiFeng
Five Spice Powder

Spicy King
Five Spice Powder

Badia
Cinnamon Powder

Deep
Cinnamon Powder

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (CINNAMON SPILL); SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS (PRODUCTS)

*Paras and EGN have told CR that they will stop selling their products and have asked stores to remove them from shelves. None of the other companies has told CR they will take any action.

Safer Spices

BEST TO USE These spices contain less than 0.16 ppm of lead

Sadaf
Seven Spice
Can use up to 1½ tsp. daily

365 Whole Foods Market
Ground Cinnamon
Can use up to 2 tsp. daily

Loisa
Organic Cinnamon
Can use up to 5¾ tsp. daily

Morton & Bassett San Francisco
100% Organic Ground Cinnamon
Can use up to 6 tsp. daily

Sadaf
Cinnamon Powder
Can use up to 6¾ tsp. daily

365 Whole Foods Market
Organic Ground Cinnamon
Can use up to 16 tsp. daily

USE SPARINGLY These spices contain between 0.23 to 0.87 ppm

Happy Belly
Ground Cinnamon
Can use up to ¼ tsp. daily

Kirkland Signature
Organic Saigon Cinnamon
Can use up to ¼ tsp. daily

Great Value
Ground Cinnamon
Can use up to ¼ tsp. daily

Penzeys
Ceylon Cinnamon
Can use up to ¼ tsp. daily

Ziyad Brand
Premium Seven Spice Blend
Can use up to ¼ tsp. daily

Trader Joe's
Organic Ground Cinnamon
Can use up to ¼ tsp. daily

The Spice Lab
Organic Ground Cinnamon
Can use up to ¼ tsp. daily

Good & Gather
Ground Cinnamon
Can use up to ¼ tsp. daily

Morton & Bassett San Francisco
Ground Cinnamon
Can use up to ¼ tsp. daily

Penzeys
Vietnamese Cinnamon
Can use up to ¼ tsp. daily

Swad
Garam Masala Powder
Can use up to ½ tsp. daily

Penzeys
Ground Cinnamon
Can use up to ½ tsp. daily

Wei-Chuan
Five Spice Powder
Can use up to ½ tsp. daily

Natural Plus Green
Five Spices Powder
Can use up to ½ tsp. daily

Simply Organic
Cinnamon
Can use up to ¾ tsp. daily

Shan
Garam Masala Powder
Can use up to ¾ tsp. daily

Abido Spices
7 Mixed Spices
Can use up to 1 tsp. daily

McCormick
Cinnamon
Can use up to 1 tsp. daily

For more information on our testing, go to CR.org/cinnamonsafety.

AUTO UPDATE

Be Prepared for Winter Driving Emergencies

Winter storms cause all kinds of unexpected challenges for drivers. Keeping a well-stocked emergency kit in your car will help you and your passengers stay safe if you find yourself on the side of the road in winter. You can build your own kit, but we've found that it's more cost-effective to buy a premade one that packs the essentials into a portable bag.

The Winter Cross Country kit ($85), shown at right, was the most complete of the kits we looked at. It includes a collapsible shovel, a blanket, a flashlight, and a first aid kit, as well as a screwdriver, pliers, a utility knife, jumper cables, a tow rope, and safety staples like a reflective window-mounted triangle to help other cars see your car in dark and/or snowy conditions.

Another good but smaller (and less pricey) option is the Lifeline First Aid AAA Winter Safety Kit ($55, not shown), which comes with most of the basic gear and standard first-aid supplies as the Winter Cross Country kit but doesn't have battery jumper cables or a tow rope. And see below for a few more things you might want to bring along.

49 Items in One Bag
The Winter Cross Country Kit comes with all of the gear pictured at right.

PHOTOS: GREGORY REID, PROP STYLING BY MEGUMI EMOTO (EMERGENCY KIT); SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS (PROTEIN BAR); MANUFACTURERS

ADD THIS TO YOUR KIT

87 OVERALL SCORE

RavPower Pioneer AC Portable Charger & Power Bank 20,000mAh $80

Keeping your phone charged is crucial in any emergency. This battery can charge your smartphone fully multiple times. It can also charge three devices simultaneously. It was a top pick in our tests.

NUTRITION
TASTE

88 Acres Protein Bar Dark Chocolate Brownie $26.50 for a pack of 9

On long road trips, it's smart to bring along water and sustenance, like a few energy bars. This 88 Acres bar is tasty and filling. (For energy bar ratings, turn to page 52.)

HotHands Hand Warmers
$14.50 for a pack of 12

Bring along a few packets of hand warmers in case you need to get out of your car when there's a breakdown. These last up to 10 hours and can be slipped easily into your gloves.

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Air Purifiers

No matter how spotless your house is, the air inside can still be dirty—especially in winter, when windows are shut tight, keeping fresh air out. And if you have pets, cook frequently, and/or burn wood in your fireplace, your air quality may be even more problematic.

Using an air purifier can really help. But our tests of more than 150 models reveal that some do a much better job than others. Check out our top models, below, which cleared the air of pollutants quickly on both their low- and high-speed fan settings. It's best to place air purifiers in the rooms you spend the most time in, like your bedroom or kitchen, and to keep them running on low, turning them up to high only when you're in the room.

SMALL ROOM (150 SQ. FT. OR LESS)

GermGuardian CDAP4500BCA
$217

85 OVERALL SCORE

	LOW SPEED	HIGH SPEED
DUST, POLLEN, SMOKE REMOVAL	5/5	5/5
NOISE	5/5	3/5

Lasko FF305
$60

77 OVERALL SCORE

	LOW SPEED	HIGH SPEED
DUST, POLLEN, SMOKE REMOVAL	5/5	5/5
NOISE	3/5	2/5

Lasko LP200
$40

76 OVERALL SCORE

	LOW SPEED	HIGH SPEED
DUST, POLLEN, SMOKE REMOVAL	4/5	5/5
NOISE	4/5	3/5

MEDIUM ROOM (150 TO 350 SQ. FT.)

GermGuardian AC5900WCA
$180

77 OVERALL SCORE

	LOW SPEED	HIGH SPEED
DUST, POLLEN, SMOKE REMOVAL	4/5	5/5
NOISE	3/5	2/5

Honeywell AirGenius 5 HFD-320
$175

77 OVERALL SCORE

	LOW SPEED	HIGH SPEED
DUST, POLLEN, SMOKE REMOVAL	4/5	5/5
NOISE	4/5	3/5

Clorox 11011
$160

74 OVERALL SCORE

	LOW SPEED	HIGH SPEED
DUST, POLLEN, SMOKE REMOVAL	4/5	5/5
NOISE	3/5	2/5

LARGE ROOM (350 TO 650 SQ. FT.)

Blueair Blue Pure 211i Max
$245

82 OVERALL SCORE

	LOW SPEED	HIGH SPEED
DUST, POLLEN, SMOKE REMOVAL	4/5	5/5
NOISE	4/5	2/5

Blueair Blue Pure 211+
$300

80 OVERALL SCORE

	LOW SPEED	HIGH SPEED
DUST, POLLEN, SMOKE REMOVAL	4/5	5/5
NOISE	3/5	2/5

Winix 9800
$260

75 OVERALL SCORE

	LOW SPEED	HIGH SPEED
DUST, POLLEN, SMOKE REMOVAL	3/5	5/5
NOISE	3/5	2/5

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS. ILLUSTRATION: RODRIGO DAMATI

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

SAVVY SHOPPER

EASIER RETURNS

Sending back gifts can be a real pain: Usually, you need to print out a label, repackage the gift, and ship it, or haul it to a store and wait in a long customer service line. But these shortcuts can help you ditch the packaging, skip the lines, and get that refund faster.

Don't Bother With Return Labels or Packaging

Some major retailers now offer return options that don't require you to repackage your items or print anything. Amazon allows some items to be returned to UPS and Whole Foods drop-off locations. You hand the item over and scan a return QR code on your smartphone. (If you opt to receive a refund back into your Amazon account, you'll see it within hours, rather than waiting days for a credit or debit card refund.) Some retailers, like Walmart, also let you return online orders to actual stores without any printouts or packaging.

Returns That Come to You

You've probably done curbside pickups, where a salesperson brings online purchases to your car. But Target and Walmart, among others, will send someone to your car for certain returns. Look for "drive-up" returns on target.com or "Curbside drop-off," on walmart.com.

Dip your chips in this: **Herdez Traditional Guacamole, Mild** 8 oz., $3.12

FOOD FACE-OFF

Best (and Worst) Party Snacks

Hosting a book club or watching football with friends? Check out the tastiest appetizers we tested—and a few we didn't like.

PIZZA

CR FAVORITE

Amy's Cheese Pizza $9

In our staff taste tests of frozen pizzas, Amy's was a big winner for its cheesy, garlicky goodness and yummy crust—crispy on the outside and tender inside.

SKIP IT

DiGiorno Four Cheese Rising Crust Pizza $6

DiGiorno's pizza crust had a white bread texture that went gummy in our mouths. And the cheese was pretty tasteless, too.

TORTILLA CHIPS

CR FAVORITE

Tostitos Bite Size Tortilla Chips $4

These chips are tasty and sturdy enough to scoop up thicker dips without cracking. Their small size ensures a good chip-to-dip ratio.

SKIP IT

Green Mountain Gringo Yellow Corn Tortilla Strips $3

These were among the least-liked chips we tried. They have a dippable shape, but we didn't like their overly fried, oily flavor.

FINGER FOOD

CR FAVORITE

Spring Valley Cocktail Beef Franks $7

Our staff labeled these pigs in a blanket a must for Super Bowl parties. The juicy franks are encased in a crisp puff pastry.

SKIP IT

El Monterey Mexican Grill Chicken & Cheese Taquitos $8

These taquitos were too doughy and didn't have much seasoning or enough filling to be satisfying.

PHOTOS: GREGORY REID, PROP STYLING BY MEGUMI EMOTO (CHIPS, TOP); MANUFACTURERS. ILLUSTRATION: RODRIGO DAMATI

RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT **CR.ORG/MORE**.

HONDA ACCORD, CIVIC, AND CR-V VEHICLES

Honda is recalling 720,810 Accord, Civic, and CR-V vehicles because of concerns that a defective high-pressure fuel pump may develop cracks that could leak fuel. The recalled models are the 2023-2024 Honda Accord and Accord Hybrid, 2025 Civic Sedan and Civic Sedan Hybrid, and 2023-2025 CR-V Hybrid. When a problem develops, a fuel smell may be detectable when idling or driving. The leak creates a risk of fire, crash, or injury.
What to do: Owners will be notified by mail and directed to a local dealership for a free inspection. If a problem is found, the pump will be replaced. Contact Honda customer service at 888-234-2138. The NHTSA campaign number is 24V763, and Honda's number for this recall is PJW.

BESTWAY AIRJET & HYDROJET SPA PUMPS

Bestway is recalling about 866,000 AirJet and HydroJet spa pumps because they can overheat and cause the plastic housing to ignite, posing a fire hazard. The pumps were sold together with spa liners online at Amazon, Bestway USA, Costco, QVC, RuralKing, Sam's Club, Spreetail, and Walmart, and at other stores nationwide from May 2021 through May 2024 for $400 to $790.
What to do: Stop using the pump. Call Bestway at 888-943-2396 or go to bestwayusa.com for details and to receive a free replacement pump or a refund of $100 for AirJet pumps or $189 for HydroJet pumps.

LIBERTY HARDWARE TUB SAFETY BARS

Liberty Hardware is recalling about 174,500 multigrip tub safety bars because the plastic sticker grip pads can become dislodged after installation on tubs with tapered side walls, making the bars unstable and posing a fall hazard. The bars were sold at Ace Hardware, Home Depot, Lowe's, Menards, Walmart, and other hardware stores and suppliers nationwide, and online at Amazon and flyingbulldogs.com from January 2011 through May 2024 for $16 to $55.
What to do: Stop using the safety bars. Call at 844-811-4541 for details and to request a prepaid label and free packaging to return the bars for a $35 refund.

JOHN DEERE COMPACT UTILITY TRACTORS

John Deere is recalling about 147,900 John Deere 1023E, 1025R, and 2025R compact utility tractors because the front bell crank in the brake linkage can fail, causing the tractor to lose braking, resulting in a crash hazard. The tractors were sold at authorized John Deere dealers nationwide from November 2017 through July 2024 for $12,700 to $21,000.
What to do: Stop using the tractor. Contact an authorized John Deere dealer to schedule a free repair. If you are not able to transport the tractor to a dealer, then the dealer will make arrangements to repair the unit at your home. Go to deere.com/en/parts-and-service/recall-information for details.

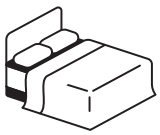
LUCID PLATFORM BEDS

Lucid is recalling about 137,000 platform beds with upholstered square tufted headboards because they can sag, break, or collapse during use, posing fall and injury hazards. The beds were sold online at Amazon, bedbathandbeyond.com, belk.com, brooksidehomedesigns.com, ebay.com, homedepot.com, jcpenney.com, lowes.com, lucidmattress.com, macys.com, maloufvip.com, menards.com, overstock.com, qvc.com, sears.com, target.com, wayfair.com, and walmart.com, and in stores nationwide from September 2019 through April 2024 for $150 to $250.
What to do: Stop using the bed. Contact Lucid at 888-910-0236 or go to lucidmattress.com for details and to get a free replacement bed frame. Consumers must write "recalled" on the support rails of the bed with permanent marker and send a photo of the bed, as well as a photo of the support rails on the underside of the bed or a photo of the law label, to recall@lucidmattress.com to receive the free replacement product.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS (HONDA); CPSC (JOHN DEERE). ICONS: RODRIGO DAMATI

JANUARY IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

SHEETS & BEDDING



SMARTWATCHES

FEBRUARY IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

MATTRESSES

SPACE HEATERS

PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

The Way to Stay Fit at Home

It's easier than ever to avoid the drive to a gym during the winter. Here's advice for getting some exercise no matter how little space you have.

by Janet Lee

YOGA MAT

Iuga Pro Non-Slip Yoga Mat $60-$66
theiuga.com

RESISTANCE BANDS

First Place Safety Toners $16-$24
www.performbetter.com

BALANCE PAD

ProsourceFit Exercise Balance Pad $27
prosourcefit.com

It's **COLD. MANY HOURS OF THE DAY ARE DARK.** Exercise is critical for your physical and mental health, but it's harder to do when even walking outside seems unappealing or unsafe. And gym memberships can be pricey. The average monthly cost ($65) was up 9 percent in 2023, according to the Health and Fitness Association.

Enter the home gym. "In the amount of time it would take you to get to a gym, you can be done with your home workout," says Tom Holland, an exercise physiologist and trainer in Darien, Conn.

The key to building a home gym you'll actually use (and even enjoy) is thinking about what you want to spend and how much time and space you have—whether it's a corner of your bedroom or a full finished basement.

The design of your home gym should be guided by your personal fitness goals, but there are also a few basics everyone should think about no matter what. For example, federal activity guidelines recommend doing at least two or more strength workouts per week that target all your major muscle groups. So ideally, every home gym should have a strength training option. You'll also want some way to get cardio indoors, whether that's marching in place in a corner or using equipment like a stationary bike. And consider a dedicated spot (a mat, for example) for exercise like yoga that helps improve balance, stability, and flexibility.

Last—and this is important—build your home gym to make space for activities you actually enjoy. Don't clutter your home with, say, a treadmill if you hate running and walking. "Your home gym should be somewhere in your house where you're excited to go," Holland says. Our guide will help you figure out what you need—and what you don't.

COST: LESS THAN $200

The Bare-Bones Home Gym

"With the low-budget option, you're spending on tools to help you build strength, stability/balance, flexibility, and mobility," says Gretchen Zelek, a fitness instructor in Los Angeles. At this price, the cardio aspect will be simple, often involving moves like jumping jacks or marching in place.

In addition to the equipment listed here, you may want to have a TV or laptop in your gym area so that you can use a workout app or turn on your favorite show. It's also nice to have a mirror to check your form, ample lighting, and good ventilation, says Ayland Letsinger, PhD, who chairs the Strategic Health Initiative on Aging for the American College of Sports Medicine. While doing strength moves, you can sit on a stability ball, perch on a sturdy chair, or simply stand.

➜ **RESISTANCE BANDS/TUBES ($18):** These large rubber bands increase in resistance the more you stretch them. You can usually buy them in sets of thin to thick, reflecting different difficulty levels, similar to having a set of dumbbells except they're much cheaper. Look for bands with handles, which are easier to grip than flat bands. They can be useful for some physical therapy moves as well.

➜ **STABILITY BALL ($30):** These inflatable balls can function as a weight bench and an excellent tool for various resistance exercises, especially core moves, Holland says. They range in size, so get one that suits your height. The wobble aspect of using a ball means you have to engage more core muscles to keep yourself stable.

➜ **ROPELESS JUMP ROPE ($10):** Weight-bearing exercises help keep bones strong, and jumping rope burns about 12 calories per minute (roughly twice as much as walking). Jumping rope is generally an outdoor activity, but you can do the same motion without the actual rope (so there's no tripping).

➜ **BALANCE PAD ($27):** To help build balance, stand on this rectangular block of foam during strength moves. Or try closing your eyes for 30 to 60 seconds while balancing on one foot.

➜ **STRETCHING STRAP ($16):** If better flexibility is one of your goals, a stretching strap can come in handy. You simply hook the center or one of the built-in loops around your foot or leg (there are different types of straps) and use your hands to adjust the intensity of the stretch.

➜ **MAT ($20-$100+):** You don't absolutely need a mat, but you might not enjoy lying on the floor. A simple yoga mat will give you a clean, slightly cushioned spot for strength moves and stretches.

How to Use This Setup

A circuit-style approach can keep you engaged and your heart rate elevated.

Here's how it works: After warming up with a few minutes of cardio (jumping jacks, marching in place, jumping rope, etc.), do a set (10 to 12 reps) of a strength move (with resistance bands, for example), then move on to another exercise (like pushups), and then another. After the last rep of the third move, do another 30 seconds to a minute of cardio. If you need rest between sets, take a minute.

Continue with this pattern for 20 to 30 minutes (or longer), then use the strap to help you stretch when you're finished.

PHOTOS: MANUFACTURERS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JACK RICHARDSON

Note: All prices are estimates. Actual prices will vary.

COST: $600-$2,000

The Next-Level Home Gym

START WITH THE basic gym tools just mentioned, then invest in a simple cardio machine and some dumbbells to allow for greater variety. Most critical: Look for high-quality equipment. You can find cheap cardio and weight systems, but they probably won't last.

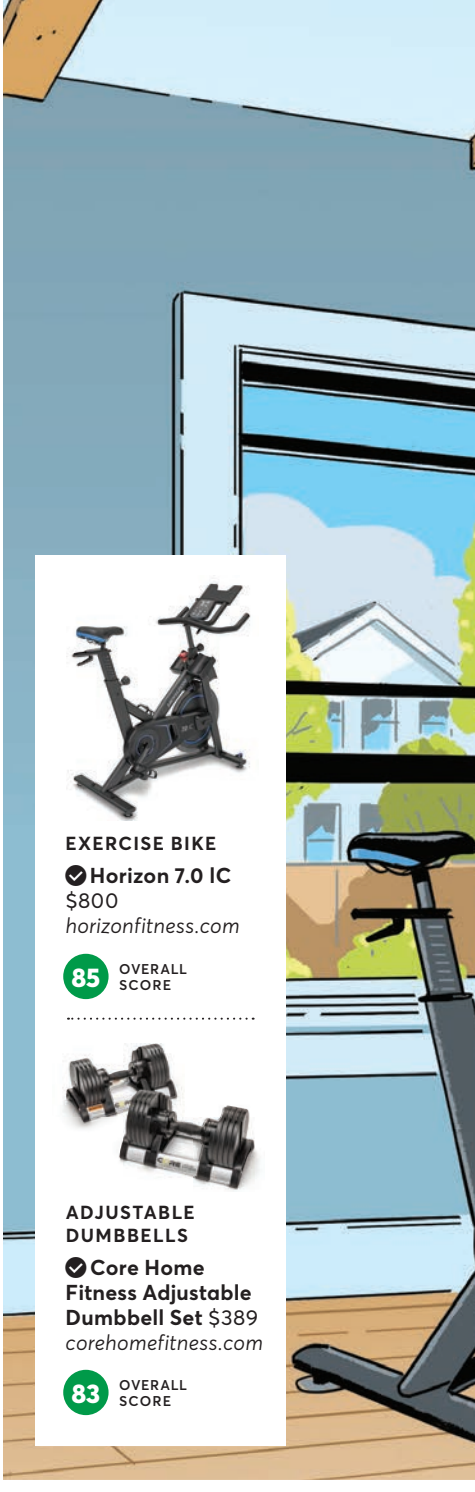
➔ **EXERCISE BIKE ($200–$1,500+):** There are several types to choose from: recumbent, upright, studio (the kind you'll find in an indoor cycling class), and more. An exercise bike lets you get an intense workout, but you can also take it slowly if you're injured or just starting out, says Nadya Swedan, MD, a physiatrist in New York City and a clinical assistant professor of physiatry at the Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra University. Bikes often cost less and take up less space than a treadmill, and you can go bare-bones or pick a connected bike that offers virtual classes and scenic rides.

➔ **ADJUSTABLE DUMBBELLS ($180-$700+):** A bunch of weights can be pricey, and storing them can be a hassle. Adjustable dumbbell sets allow you to go from low to high resistance (the equivalent of several pairs of dumbbells in one) with one set of grips in a relatively small amount of space. They're much easier for at-home weightlifting, Holland says.

➔ **SUSPENSION TRAINER ($230):** These strappy, portable devices help you increase or even decrease the challenge of moving your own body weight as you do pushups, lunges, and more with your arms or feet in the handles. All you need is a sturdy anchor point or closed door and you've upgraded your workout. Some come with an app to help you get the hang of using the device.

How to Use This Setup

You can do the same circuit-style workout, adding in weight exercises with the dumbbells or suspension trainer. Lengthen your workouts by making your cardio intervals a little longer on the bike. Or make them more boot-camp style, where you alternate riding on the bike for 5 minutes with 5 minutes of resistance training (using the dumbbells and/or the suspension trainer). Repeat the two for as long as you want or lengthen the time for each to 10 minutes. The back-and-forth makes it more interesting than doing long blocks of cardio or weights. You can challenge yourself to increase the speed or incline on the bike for 15 to 30 seconds (before returning to an easier pace), which is called interval training, or try to hit a certain distance within one time frame and then attempt to beat it the next time.



EXERCISE BIKE

Horizon 7.0 IC $800
horizonfitness.com

85 OVERALL SCORE

ADJUSTABLE DUMBBELLS

Core Home Fitness Adjustable Dumbbell Set $389
corehomefitness.com

83 OVERALL SCORE

WORKOUT CLASSES IN YOUR HOME GYM

A home gym makes it easier to exercise, but you still have to turn it into a habit—otherwise your new gear might gather dust. Apps and programs that offer guided workouts and virtual group classes offer motivation and fresh ideas.

Free videos

If you're just getting started with strength training, search for the Mayo Clinic's strength training "How-To Video Collection" for some helpful basics. Ready for more? The YMCA at Home YouTube channel offers dozens of free guided routines for cardio, strengthening, and stretching. If you want more variety and goal-oriented programs, the free Nike Training Club app offers a library of trainer-guided workouts for everything from yoga to

strength, and you can sort by the equipment needed to match what you have at home.

Paid apps and programs
Your cardio machine—a NordicTrack, Peloton, or ProForm bike or treadmill, for example—may come with a paid subscription that gives you access to a vast library of scenic runs/rides and fitness classes that often go far beyond cardio. Peloton offers live virtual classes. You can pay to access these apps even if you don't have a cardio machine. Peloton will cost you $24 per month; iFit Train is $15 per month. Stand-alone apps like Zwift ($20 per month) and Kinomap ($12 per month) also offer options for community-building and guided workouts.

HOW TO STAY SAFE ON A TREADMILL

Treadmills are responsible for thousands of injuries every year, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. When setting up your home gym to include a treadmill, think about the following:

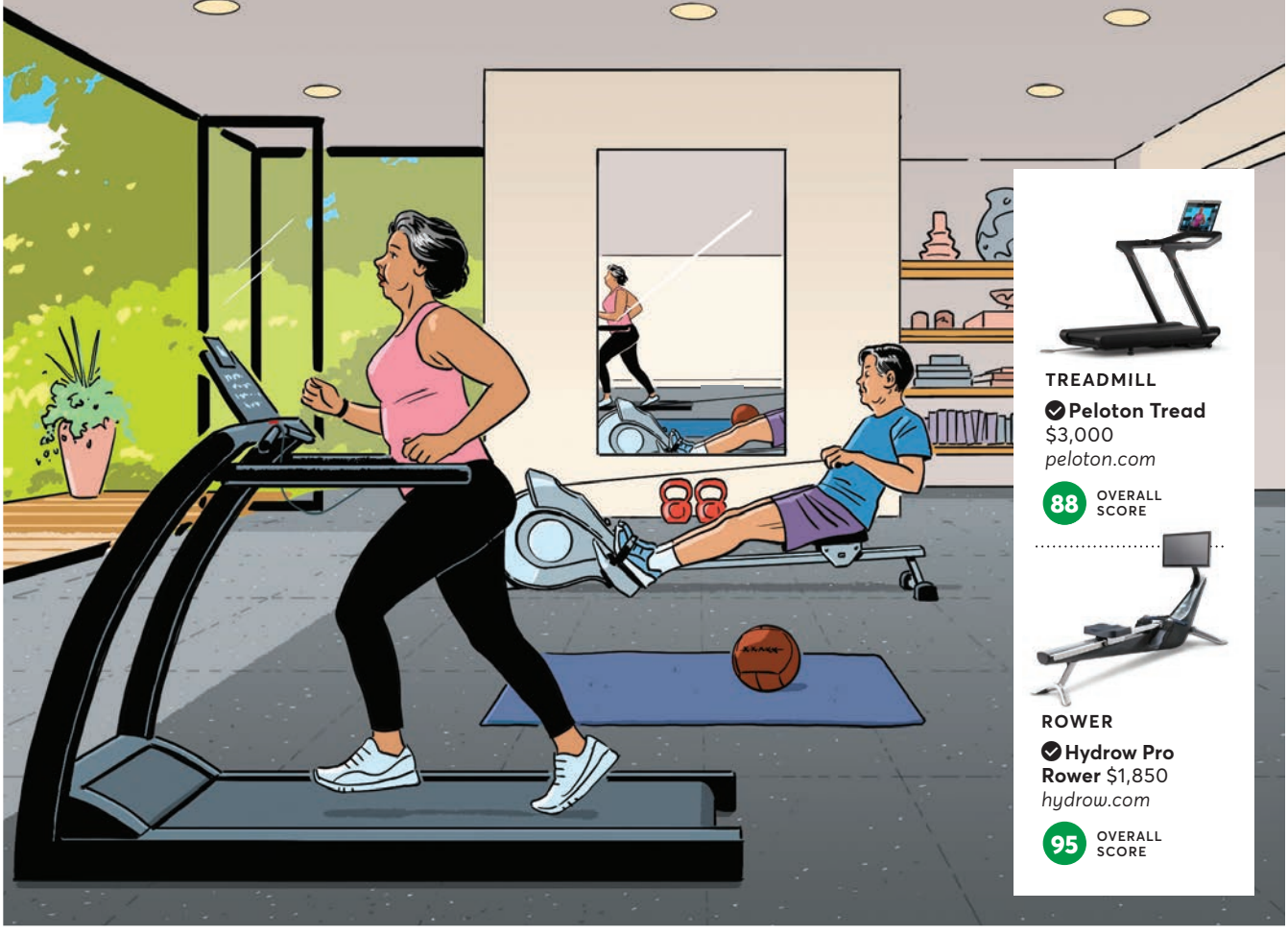
Make sure you have the space to avoid colliding with a wall in case of a fall. Your owner's manual will tell you how much space to allow to the sides and back, but aim to have at least 2 feet on each side and 6 feet behind. Don't forget to check the ceiling height, too, because a treadmill deck is several inches off the floor.

An emergency shutoff function is a must. It kicks in if you trip or drift too far toward the back of the deck and dislodge the safety key.

Lock the treadmill when it's not in use if you have kids in your household by removing the safety key. If you can lock the room to your home gym, that's even better. And always keep kids away from the treadmill when you're using it.

Never start the treadmill while standing on it. Stand on the side rails and step on the treadmill as it starts moving at a slow speed. When coming off, slow your speed, then step off.

Stay alert. Your body tends to follow where your head goes, so if you're looking around or you're distracted while on a treadmill, you might be more likely to take a spill.



TREADMILL

Peloton Tread $3,000
peloton.com

88 OVERALL SCORE

ROWER

Hydrow Pro Rower $1,850
hydrow.com

95 OVERALL SCORE

COST: $5,000-$12,000 OR MORE

The Full Gym Experience

WITH A BIGGER budget, you can opt for the bells and whistles and allow yourself more options for cardio cross-training. Just think about what you enjoy doing at the gym and get that equipment for home. If you're a fan of Pilates or barre classes, you can invest in a reformer or barre. With a full setup, you can even hire a personal trainer or physical therapist to come to your home, potentially splitting the cost of sessions with a friend.

➜**TREADMILL ($1,000–$6,000+):** Having one of these ensures that you can walk, jog, or run whatever the weather. Choose from folding or nonfolding models, and look for incline options so that you can challenge yourself with hills as well as speed. Make sure you get a sturdy machine with an emergency shutoff in case of a fall. (Skip walking pads, many of which our testers have found to be unsafe and unreliable.) As with bikes, a connected model (such as one from NordicTrack or Peloton) can provide all sorts of creative workouts and even allow you to virtually enjoy scenery from around the world.

➜**ROWER ($700-$3,000+):** A rower can work your entire body at once, Letsinger says: arms, core, and legs. That's why it's a good partner to a treadmill or bike, which focuses on the lower body. It's one of the only common cardio machines that requires you to use your upper body. An elliptical is a somewhat gentler option, but it doesn't provide the same sort of upper-body workout.

➜**MEDICINE BALL ($85):** Weighted, soft-sided balls are another way to get resistance work, especially for your core, into your routine. You can throw them against a brick or cement wall or down on a sturdy floor (if you don't have neighbors below).

➜**KETTLEBELLS ($40):** These weighted balls with handles—hold tightly while you swing one—give you more resistance training options and also help build grip and core strength, and cardio fitness.

How to Use This Setup

The high-end gym is really about having options for cardio and strength training. Try doing 10- to 15-minute chunks on each machine, back-to-back, putting a few sets of weight moves in between. You can also consider alternating from day-to-day which cardio machine you use.

By now you probably get the idea that the key to getting the most out of your home gym—in addition to picking tools you enjoy—is staying engaged, getting creative to stave off boredom, and adjusting the intensity of exercise so that the level of difficulty feels right to you.

PHOTOS, THIS SPREAD AND PREVIOUS SPREAD: CONSUMER REPORTS, MANUFACTURERS

Ratings › **Get Moving** A cardio machine is probably the biggest expense you'll have in creating a home gym. That's why we put treadmills, ellipticals, exercise bikes, and rowers through rigorous tests in our labs.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features + Specs											
			Ergonomics	Construction	Ease of use	Exercise range	User safety	Motor (hp)	Belt, LxW (in.)	Maximum incline	Maximum speed (mph)	Weight capacity (lb.)	Shipping weight (lb.)	Quick speed controls	Quick incline controls	Chest strap included	Heart rate control programs	Reading shelf
TREADMILLS: NONFOLDING																		
Peloton Tread	88	$3,000	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	3.0	59 x 20	11.8%	12.5	300	360	●	●	●		
True Performance 100	87	$3,900	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	3.0	59 x 22	15.0%	12.0	350	328	●	●	●	●	●
Sole TT8	86	$2,700	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	4.0	60 x 22	10.4%	12.0	400	330	●	●		●	●
Life Fitness Run CX	85	$3,600	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	3.0	60 x 22	14.0%	12.0	400	463	●	●	●	●	●
Landice L7 Pro Sports	83	$5,000	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	4.0	57 x 20	13.3%	12.0	400	360	●	●	●		●
True M50	83	$3,000	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	3.0	58 x 20	14.5%	12.0	350	249	●	●		●	●
SportsArt T615	81	$4,900	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	3.0	57 x 20	13.6%	12.0	400	267	●			●	●
Spirit XT685	81	$2,700	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	4.0	60 x 22	12.3%	12.0	425	302	●	●		●	●
TREADMILLS: FOLDING																		
Horizon 7.4 AT	87	$1,600	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	3.5	60 x 22	14.2%	12.0	350	364	●	●	●	●	●
Sole F80	86	$1,700	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	3.5	60 x 22	12.8%	12.0	375	298	●	●	●	●	●
Horizon 7.0 AT	85	$1,000	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	3.0	60 x 19	14.8%	12.0	325	290	●	●		●	●
Horizon 7.8 AT	84	$2,000	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	4.0	60 x 22	10.7%	12.0	375	340	●	●	●	●	●
BowFlex BXT8J	84	$1,300	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	2.0	61 x 20	14.4%	12.0	300	248	●	●	●	●	●
BowFlex Treadmill 22	84	$2,800	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	3.0	61 x 22	20.9%	12.0	400	375	●	●	●		●
Spirit XT485	83	$2,400	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	4.0	60 x 22	13.7%	12.0	425	313	●	●	●	●	●
LifeSpan TR5500i	82	$2,600	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	4.0	58 x 22	11.8%	13.5	350	271	●	●		●	●
BowFlex Treadmill 10	82	$2,000	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	2.5	61 x 22	13.9%	12.0	400	351	●	●	●		●
NordicTrack Commercial 2450	82	$3,000	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	3.6	59 x 20	11.0%	12.0	300	353	●	●		●	
Xterra TRX5500	82	$2,000	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	3.25	61 x 20	10.6%	12.0	350	250			●	●	●
Sole F65	81	$1,500	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏬	3.25	60 x 22	12.5%	12.0	350	285	●	●	●	●	●
Xterra TRX3500	81	$900	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	3.0	61 x 20	11.1%	12.0	350	236	●	●		●	●
ProForm Pro 2000	81	$1,800	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	3.6	59 x 20	10.7%	12.0	300	264	●	●		●	●
ProForm Carbon TLX	81	$1,000	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	3.0	59 x 20	11.8%	12.0	300	249	●	●		●	●
NordicTrack Commercial 1750	81	$2,500	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	3.6	59 x 20	11.5%	12.0	300	288	●	●		●	

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/treadmills.

HOW WE TEST: **Overall Score** is based on the performance of the product in all our tests. **Ergonomics** reflects how well the machine accommodates the needs of different users. **Construction** considers design choices and our perception of quality based on noise, feel, and durability test results. As part of our durability tests, we use a custom rig with metal "feet" built by CR engineers that "runs" along each treadmill long enough to simulate about a year of use. **Ease of use** indicates how easy it is to read the display and use the programs and controls. **Exercise range** is how well each machine provides an effective workout for users of various fitness levels, which can be especially important if a machine is shared by different household members. **User safety** assesses safety features such as stability and emergency stop.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features + Specs								
			Ergonomics	Exercise range	Ease of use	Construction	User safety	Resistance levels	Stride length settings	Incline levels	Operational footprint, LxW (in.)	Weight (lb.)	Standard power supply	Chest strap included	Magazine rack	Multigrip handgrips
ELLIPTICALS: WITHOUT HEART RATE PROGRAMS																
Octane Fitness Q35X	71	$2,500	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	20	1	1	77 x 25	232	Transformer		●	
Schwinn 411	71	$600	🔼	⏫	❗	⏫	🔼	16	1	1	70 x 24	100	Transformer		●	
NordicTrack AirGlide 14i	70	$1,600	🔼	❗	⏫	⏫	⏫	26	1	20	69.25 x 25.75	244	120 volts			
Horizon Fitness EX 59	69	$700	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	10	1	1	73 x 22.5	183	120 volts		●	
Octane Fitness Q37x	66	$3,000	🔼	🔼	❗	⏫	⏫	20	1	1	77 x 24	282	120 volts		●	●
Best Fitness BFE2	65	$1,700	❗	❗	🔼	⏫	⏫	16	1	1	66 x 29	207	Transformer		●	
Sunny SF-E321006	63	$900	❗	❗	🔼	⏫	🔼	10	1	1	70 x 24	100	Transformer		●	
SportsArt E80C	55	$2,600	🔼	🔽	🔼	⏫	🔼	14	1	1	73 x 24.25	167.2	120 volts		●	
ELLIPTICALS: WITH HEART RATE PROGRAMS																
Sole E95S	84	$2,200	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	20	11	1	84 x 31	309	120 volts	●	●	●
Life Fitness E5 Go	78	$5,500	⏫	❗	🔼	⏫	⏫	20	6	1	85.5 x 34.25	292.6	120 volts	●	●	●
Sole E25	77	$1,100	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼	20	1	20	73.75 x 22	209	120 volts		●	
Life Fitness E1 Go	75	$2,900	⏫	❗	🔼	🔼	🔼	20	1	1	81.75 x 30	242	Transformer	●	●	
Schwinn 430	72	$1,000	🔼	❗	🔼	⏫	⏫	20	1	6	70 x 28.25	182.6	Transformer		●	
Xterra FS3.0	69	$700	🔼	❗	🔼	🔼	🔼	16	1	1	58.5 x 24	112.2	Transformer		●	
Horizon 7.0 AE	68	$1,000	⏫	❗	❗	🔼	⏫	20	1	20	76.25 x 23.5	236	120 volts		●	
Sole E35	66	$1,700	🔼	🔽	⏫	🔼	⏫	20	1	20	83.25 x 31.75	272	120 volts	●	●	●
Fitnex E70	61	$2,900	🔼	🔽	🔼	⏫	🔼	16	1	1	87.25 x 30.25	220	Generator		●	●
Spirit XE395	57	$2,100	⏫	🔽	❗	🔼	🔼	20	1	41	75 x 24	235	120 volts	●	●	
Xterra FS3.5	55	$800	❗	🔽	❗	🔼	🔼	24	1	1	58 x 22.5	124	Transformer		●	
Star Trac 4CT	40	$2,900	🔼	⏬	❗	⏫	⏫	40	1	1	77.5 x 28.25	350	Generator		●	

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on the performance of the product in all our tests. **Ergonomics** reflects how well the machine accommodates the needs of different users, which is particularly important for ellipticals because the path your feet take when you use the machine is inflexible and depends on the machine's design. We use a figure proportioned to a man in the 95th height percentile and a woman in the 5th height percentile to evaluate comfort and reach for a wide range of users. **Exercise range** evaluates the range of exercise intensity each machine provides, using a panel of people of varying fitness levels to assess the difficulty of different resistance settings. **Construction** considers design choices and our perception of quality based on noise, feel, and ride. **User safety** is based on our evaluation of potential pinch points, pedal sizes, and coverings, as well as the design of the elliptical's handles. If positioned poorly, the handles can cause eye injuries.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results							Features + Specs							
												Warranty					
			Adjustability	Data interface	Noise	Features	Capacity	Warranty	Ease of assembly	Weight (lb.)	Weight capacity (lb.)	Frame	Parts	Labor	Touchscreen	Reading shelf
EXERCISE BIKES: CONNECTED																
BowFlex VeloCore Bike 16"	92	$1,800	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	158	325	2 years	2 years	1 year	●	●
Peloton Bike	83	$1,450	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	⏫	135	297	5 years	1 year	1 year	●	
NordicTrack S22i	79	$1,700	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	❗	205	350	10 years	2 years	1 year	●	
Echelon EX-5S	73	$1,300	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	124	300	1 year	1 year	1 year	●	
EXERCISE BIKES: CONVENTIONAL																
Horizon 7.0 IC	85	$800	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼	87	300	Lifetime	3 years	1 year		●
Schwinn IC4	83	$1,000	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	106	330	10 years	3 years	1 year		●
Sole SB900	81	$1,100	⏫	🔼	⏫	❗	⏫	⏫	🔼	160	300	Lifetime	3 year	1 year		●
Sunny SF-B1805SMART	78	$500	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	⏫	❗	🔼	126	300	3 years	6 months	NS		●
Diamondback 1260sc	77	$1,000	⏫	🔼	⏫	❗	⏫	🔼	🔼	130	300	Lifetime	1 year	90 days		●
Concept2 BikeErg	70	$1,100	⏫	❗	⏫	⏬	⏫	⏫	🔼	68	300	5 years	2 years	2 years		
Matrix ICR50	49	$1,000	❗	⏬	⏫	❗	⏫	⏫	❗	131	300	5 years	3 years	1 year		

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results				Features + Specs								
			Ergonomics	Ease of use	Construction	User safety	Weight capacity (lb.)	Resistance type	Displays stroke rate	Displays time/500m	Displays split time	Exercise programs	Stands upright	Workout history	Online support
ROWERS															
Peloton Row Basics	95	$3,195	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	300	Electronically controlled	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hydrow Pro Rower	95	$1,850	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	375	Electromagnetic	●	●	●	●		●	●
Sunny Health & Fitness Magnetic Rowing Machine (SF-RW5515)	82	$250	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	250	Magnetic							
WaterRower A1 Home	71	$1,200	⏫	❗	⏫	⏫	275	Water baffle	●	●			●		●
LifeSpan RW1000	71	$899	🔼	❗	⏫	⏫	300	Eddy current	●				●		

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on the performance of the product in all our tests. **For bikes, adjustability** considers how precisely users can adjust the position of the seat and handlebars. **Data interface** evaluates the quality of the data displayed during your workout. **Noise** tells you how quiet the machine is. **Features** looks at toe clips, dumbbells, and other features not core to the bike's operation. **Capacity** and **warranty** are evaluated based on product information. **Ease of assembly** is a measure of how long the bike took to assemble, from unpacking to being ready to ride. **For rowers,** ergonomics, ease of use, construction, and user safety are evaluated similarly to treadmills and ellipticals (see previous pages).

NATURAL C

Supplements for a healthier heart. Chiropractic to ease back pain. Acupuncture

URES Which Ones Work (and Which Don't)

for better sleep. Our experts reveal the treatments to use, and the ones to avoid.

BY HALLIE LEVINE PHOTOGRAPH BY GREGORY REID

OUR INTEREST in nontraditional treatments for conditions like arthritis, back pain, insomnia, and high blood pressure has probably never been higher. Nearly 40 percent of Americans tried an approach like yoga, meditation, acupuncture, or chiropractic in 2022, according to an analysis published in JAMA—about double the percentage who went for such therapies 20 years earlier. A September 2024 Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of 2,146 U.S. adults found that 40 percent had taken a dietary supplement like fish oil, melatonin, or vitamins to treat a specific medical problem, and 64 percent of them said that it helped.

Why are we so keen on these different ways of handling our health concerns? A 2020 review in the journal BMC Complementary Medicine and Therapies concluded that it's partly due to dissatisfaction with conventional medicine. "People increasingly seek more holistic approaches to health, which emphasize prevention and overall well-being, rather than just addressing symptoms," says Jeremy Ng, PhD, editor in chief of the journal Complementary and Integrative Medicine.

The evidence is becoming clearer that some are safe and effective—on their own or in tandem with traditional therapies. "Twenty years ago, acupuncture was considered a fringe therapy," says Sandra Darling, DO, a physician in the wellness and preventive medicine department at Cleveland Clinic. "Now it's used routinely at large, established medical centers" for issues from lower back pain to seasonal allergies.

In this guide, you'll find common natural treatments for seven health issues, broken down into three categories. (When it comes to most food labels, the term "natural" has no clear meaning and isn't regulated, so consumers shouldn't rely on it when grocery shopping.)

▼ **WHAT WORKS:** Treatments where the preponderance of evidence suggests they're helpful—though they may not offer 100 percent relief from particular issues—and have few drawbacks if used properly.

▼ **THE JURY IS STILL OUT:** There's some evidence these are helpful, but it's not yet clear that they're consistently effective.

▼ **DON'T USE:** Therapies that don't really work or may cause problems, such as interactions with your regular medications.

4 TYPES OF NATURAL THERAPIES

The cures we're covering fall into one of these categories:

NUTRITION
Dietary supplements, herbs, and foods.

BODY
Acupuncture, massage, and other hands-on therapies, and those like saline nasal rinses.

MIND
Talk therapy, meditation, and treatments such as music therapy and hypnotherapy.

MIND/BODY
Physical activities that harness the power of your mind; also, CBD and light therapy.

Back Pain

▼ WHAT WORKS

Acupuncture The American College of Physicians (ACP) recommends this therapy—where thin needles are inserted into specific spots on the body—for both acute and chronic lower back pain before trying medication. (Lower back pain is considered acute if it eases in less than six weeks and chronic if it lasts for more than three months.) "It may relax overactive muscles, and increase blood flow into the region," says Tyler Moldoff, DPT, a physical therapist at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City. Medicare covers it for diagnosed chronic lower back pain.

Spinal manipulation The ACP suggests this therapy—where a chiropractor or physical therapist applies pressure to spinal joints or moves them past their normal range—for acute and chronic lower back discomfort before trying meds. "It releases gas and pressure in the joints, calming nearby muscles," says Moldoff. Medicare covers this for subluxation (slightly misaligned vertebrae). Check with your doctor first; in some cases, it could temporarily worsen discomfort.

Massage The ACP advises this for acute—but not chronic—back pain. "If you've pulled your back muscles and are in a lot of pain, it makes sense," says Roger Chou, MD, director of the Pacific-Northwest Evidence-Based Practice Center at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland.

PHOTO, PREVIOUS SPREAD: PROP STYLING BY MEGUMI EMOTO

ICONS BY HUBERT TERESZKIEWICZ

Cupping for Pain
In this 5,000-year-old practice, suction cups placed on the skin are quickly pulled off to boost blood flow to the area and speed healing.

PHOTO: MILAN KRASULA/GETTY IMAGES

Mindfulness-based stress reduction

MBSR, where you learn to shift your focus away from your discomfort, significantly improved chronic lower back pain in a 2024 review of 18 studies. (Meditation and cognitive therapy helped, too.) Check local medical and back pain centers or search goodtherapy.org or psychologytoday.com for therapists.

Mind-body exercise

Yoga, tai chi, and Pilates were among the most effective physical activities for chronic back pain in a review of 118 studies. "All are supported by evidence, but the best research seems to be around yoga," says Chou. For optimal results, talk to your doctor; they may send you to physical therapy to learn the right moves.

▼ THE JURY IS STILL OUT

Cupping This ancient Chinese practice involves applying suction cups to the skin, then pulling them quickly off to increase blood flow to the area and, thus, speed the healing process. The therapy may offer some short-term relief for chronic back pain, a 2024 review of studies suggests. But more studies and specific treatment protocols are needed, the researchers say.

▼ DON'T USE

Kratom Supplements have been linked to seizures and liver toxicity, according to the Food and Drug Administration. It's illegal to market kratom in the U.S.

CBD Cannabidiol, a substance in cannabis that doesn't get users high, hasn't been found effective for most back pain. And over-the-counter CBD isn't FDA-regulated, so you don't know what's in it, says Chou. A 2024 review of studies found that some products contained ingredients that weren't listed on labels–among them psychoactive substances.

▼ HOW TO PICK A HIGH-QUALITY SUPPLEMENT

When you're shopping for dietary supplements, it's important to choose carefully—because the Food and Drug Administration generally doesn't regulate supplements the way it does drugs. So you can't always be sure that what's on the label is what's in the bottle. For instance, in a 2023 study published in JAMA, 22 of 25 brands of melatonin gummies evaluated contained different amounts of the hormone from what was listed on their labels. One product had 347 percent of the labeled amount.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO? Check supplement packaging for a seal from an independent testing group like the nonprofit US Pharmacopeia, which sets the most widely accepted standards for dietary supplements, according to CR's experts. (Find a list of USP-verified products at quality-supplements.org.) Another reputable testing organization is the not-for-profit NSF International (search info.nsf.org/certified/dietary for NSF-certified supplements). Two for-profit companies, UL Solutions and ConsumerLab, also test supplements.

Achy Joints

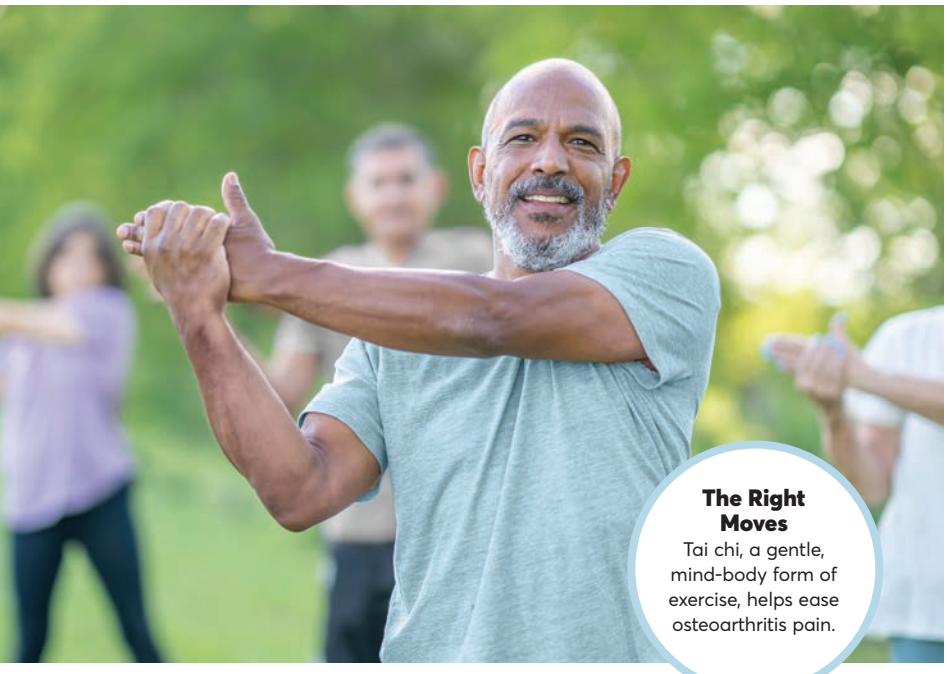
▼ WHAT WORKS

Tai chi Have osteoarthritis in your knee or hip? The slow, gentle moves and deep breathing of this practice—which enhance strength and balance, among other benefits—are strongly recommended by the American College of Rheumatology. Look for nearby classes at community and senior centers, YMCAs, and YWCAs, or search the directory on the American Tai Chi & Qigong Association website, at amtaichi.org.

Yoga Various types of yoga reduced knee arthritis pain and stiffness in a 2024 review of eight studies. "Both yoga and tai chi build up isometric muscle strength," which helps release proteins that can reduce arthritis-related and systemic inflammation, says Moldoff. The researchers say that in-person supervised instruction is best (you can check community and senior centers, and Y's for gentle yoga or "yoga for arthritis" classes).

▼ THE JURY IS STILL OUT

Glucosamine and chondroitin Users of this supplement (which contains two substances that are naturally found in human cartilage) may feel some relief from joint pain. But this is known to have a strong placebo effect, so that may be at play in some instances. And studies have had inconsistent results, says Yale Fillingham, MD, an orthopedic surgeon and associate professor at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia and co-author of the OA guidelines from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS).



The Right Moves
Tai chi, a gentle, mind-body form of exercise, helps ease osteoarthritis pain.

Turmeric Supplements of this spice improved pain and function for people with OA—in some cases as much as over-the-counter pain relievers, in a review of 10 studies published in the British Medical Journal. The drawback: We don't yet know the optimal dosage.

Acupuncture Some people do find acupuncture helpful for arthritis-related discomfort, but the AAOS gives it a limited recommendation—meaning studies that show this therapy eased pain were of low quality or had mixed results.

Massage The AAOS gives this a limited recommendation. "It appears to lead to very short-term improvements in pain and function, really only for days or a couple weeks," says Fillingham. The Arthritis Foundation advises talking with your doctor beforehand and notes that moderate pressure (not too light and not too hard) may be best. "You want to be very careful and even avoid deep pressure, because it could injure your bone, tendon, or joint," says Farah Hameed, MD, associate chair of the department of rehabilitation and regenerative medicine at Columbia University Medical Center in New York City.

Chiropractic Some research, such as a 2022 Canadian study, suggests that this therapy can reduce OA pain. But it's not appropriate for all kinds of arthritis, according to the Arthritis Foundation. And if you have any spinal degeneration, moving joints past their natural range of motion could worsen OA, Hameed says.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HENNIE HAWORTH

Sleep Problems

▼ WHAT WORKS

Cognitive behavior therapy This short-term therapy, aimed at changing thoughts and behaviors that may play a part in sleeplessness, is the gold standard for insomnia, says sleep medicine expert Eric Zhou, PhD, an assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School in Boston. Plus, the relaxation techniques that are part of it–like slow, deep breathing–help further ease insomnia and improve sleep quality, so you feel more rested when you wake up, he says. CBT for insomnia may be covered by Medicare and other health insurers. Ask your doctor or a sleep specialist for a referral or check with the Society of Behavioral Sleep Medicine (behavioralsleep.org) or the International Directory of CBT-I providers (cbti.directory).

Hypnotherapy Guided hypnosis, which puts you in a calm, focused state where you can access and use your inner resources, helps about half of those who try it sleep better. So says a 2023 review of more than 40 studies, published in the International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis. (You'll need to work with someone trained in hypnotherapy; see "How to Find a 'Natural' Healthcare Pro," on page 35.)

Tai chi and yoga Both can help you feel calmer and more relaxed, which can lead to fewer sleep disruptions, says Zhou. Tai chi and gentle yoga such as some forms of hatha are thought to increase levels of the brain chemical gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), which appears to play a role in mood and sleep. Studies such as a 2023 meta-analysis published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health suggest that tai chi helps with not only insomnia but also the depression and anxiety that can accompany it.

▼ THE JURY IS STILL OUT

Melatonin There's simply not enough proof that supplements of this sleep-regulating hormone work for chronic insomnia, says the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM). But it may have benefits for certain other issues. "It's recommended short-term to treat jet lag" and some uncommon sleep disorders, says Zhou. Otherwise, "it hasn't been shown to help you get a better night's sleep."

Vitamin D A 2022 review of 19 studies published in the journal Nutrients suggested that this supplement may improve sleep quality–if you're D-deficient. (Up to 35 percent of adults are thought to be low in this vitamin.) But the researchers say more information on its effects on sleep quantity and on sleep disorders is needed.

Magnesium If you're deficient in this mineral, as many people with insomnia–and a lot of the rest of us–are, you might consider a supplement, says sleep specialist Michael Breus, PhD, author of "Energize!" (Little, Brown Spark, 2021). A 2021 review of studies, published in BMC Complementary Medicine and Therapies, suggested that these supplements helped older adults with insomnia doze off about 17 minutes faster, on average, and added about 16 minutes to their total snooze time–but the authors say more rigorous research is needed. Note that magnesium supplements may cause diarrhea.

Ashwagandha Supplements and extracts from this evergreen shrub may hold some promise. But so far, the evidence has been mixed, says Breus, and ashwagandha can carry side effects such as diarrhea and headache and may increase testosterone and thyroid hormone levels. If you take medications to manage blood pressure or blood sugar, talk with your doctor before trying ashwagandha. It can affect both.

Acupuncture There's been little evidence so far on traditional acupuncture for insomnia. But electroacupuncture–which passes low-frequency electric current through the needles that are used–helped with sleeplessness and depression, in a study published in 2022 in JAMA Network Open.

▼ DON'T USE

Valerian Supplements of this flowering plant have worked no better than a placebo in most research studies, so the AASM advises against using it as a sleep aid. "Valerian does contain GABA [a brain chemical], which helps promote sleep," says Zhou. "But we're not sure the GABA even enters your brain, which is where it needs to go if it's going to work."

Mental Health

▼ WHAT WORKS

Acupuncture Four weeks of acupuncture can make a big difference in the moods of those who are dealing with depression, according to a 2024 meta-analysis of 20 studies published in the journal Frontiers in Neuroscience.

Music therapy This technique, where a therapist uses music to help you process your feelings, along with treatments like antidepressants and talk therapy, eased depression short-term more than meds and therapy alone, in a 2017 Cochrane review. "Music reaches the parts of your brain that aren't necessarily cognitive, but impact emotions and emotional regulation," says Philip R. Muskin, MD, a psychiatrist at Columbia University Irving Medical Center in New York City. You can look for therapists at musictherapy.org, but you don't need formal therapy to benefit, he says. Regularly listening to relaxing music may help, too.

Yoga All kinds of exercise can boost mood, but yoga may be better than most. Here's why: "It's mindfulness combined with movement," says Ramaswamy Viswanathan, MD, president of the American Psychiatric Association. Hence the findings of a meta-analysis published in 2023 in the journal Frontiers in Psychiatry, which concluded that yoga can help with the symptoms of both depression and anxiety. For maximum mood benefits, do it consistently–say, three or four days a week, says Muskin. And note that it doesn't matter which type of yoga you choose, or whether you take a formal class or just do poses at home.

▼ THE JURY IS STILL OUT

SAM-e This supplement, a synthetic form of a compound found naturally in the body, has been shown to be helpful for depression–and appears to be very safe, Muskin says. For instance, a review of studies published in 2020 in the Annals of General Psychiatry found that taking SAM-e daily eased major depression. But the authors say more large studies are needed. Still, if you're considering trying it, Muskin advises starting with a supplement of about 200 to 400 mg a day; some people may need up to 2,400 mg taken in several smaller doses.

Bright light therapy While this treatment–where you sit in front of a special light-emitting box for a period of time each morning–has long been the standard for seasonal affective disorder, it may offer help for garden variety depression, too. Because studies done on it so far for typical depression aren't high-quality, "it's fine to try it as an adjunct to other treatments, but do it under your doctor's guidance," says Viswanathan. You'll need a device that's designed specifically for this purpose. Get tips on how to choose a light box at cet.org/how-to-select-a-light-box.

▼ DON'T USE

St. John's wort While this supplement may ease depression, it can interact with many drugs. For instance, St. John's wort can affect serotonin levels, so taking both the supplement and an antidepressant that has the same action may lead to potentially serious side effects. It can also interact with some migraine drugs and blood thinners, making them less effective.

CBD Both CBD and various forms of cannabis were found to be ineffective for depression, in a 2019 meta-analysis published in the journal Lancet Psychiatry. According to the researchers, "the use of cannabinoids as treatments for mental health disorders cannot be justified at this time." Also, you can't rely on CBD product labels to be correct.

Heart Issues

▼ WHAT WORKS

Omega-3 fatty acids Taking about 3 daily grams of these supplements reduced high blood pressure modestly, according to a 2022 American Heart Association review. But dining on fatty fish like salmon, herring, mackerel, or sardines two to three times a week may give you similar benefits, says Nieca Goldberg, MD, a clinical associate professor at the New York University Grossman School of Medicine in New York City. Omega-3 supplements also appear to reduce triglycerides (fats that circulate in the blood along

with cholesterol). But if yours are high, a prescription-level omega-3 may be best, Goldberg says.

Berberine This supplement helps reduce cholesterol absorption, and one meta-analysis found that 900 to 1,500 mg daily significantly improved total cholesterol, LDL ("bad") cholesterol, and triglycerides. "We sometimes use it in people who can't reach their cholesterol target even on statins," says Robert S. Rosenson, MD, director of the Metabolism and Lipids Program for the Mount Sinai Health System in New York City.

Meditation Both meditation and mindfulness-based stress-reducing techniques–like focusing on your breathing–can help you better manage high blood pressure and the stress that can raise it, according to the AHA. "For people with mildly elevated blood pressure, this may be enough to keep them off of medications," says Goldberg. Even using an app like Calm or Smiling Mind for a few minutes a couple of times a day may help, she says.

Yoga People who regularly do yoga are 85 percent more likely to have normal blood pressure than others, says a 2022 study in BMC Public Health. The practice "induces a relaxation response in your body that lowers your blood pressure," says Goldberg. She advises avoiding hot yoga, which can lead to dehydration.

HOW TO FIND A 'NATURAL' HEALTHCARE PRO

The mini-guide below can help you locate practitioners with the right credentials—and avoid potential pitfalls. As you're deciding whom to see, ask providers about their training and education, and whether they're licensed or certified in the treatment you're interested in, says Jeremy Ng, PhD. Also, find out whether they'll communicate with your primary care doctor or specialist, and get specifics about any therapy you're considering: risks, costs, insurance coverage, and how it will work with your current care.

ACUPUNCTURIST (LAC)
In most states, acupuncturists must graduate from an accredited master's or doctorate program in the practice, and be both state licensed and certified by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine. You can search for practitioners at asacu.org/find-a-practitioner or directory.nccaom.org.

CHIROPRACTOR
In the U.S., chiropractors must earn a Doctor of Chiropractic (DC) degree, pass the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners exam, and have a state license (search for local providers at handsdownbetter.org/find-a-doctor).

HOMEOPATHIC PRACTITIONER
These are often MDs or DOs or naturopathic doctors. Homeopathy is based on the idea that "like cures like." So a practitioner might treat a cold with diluted red onion extract—because both a cold and exposure to onion can cause a runny nose and watery eyes. The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health says there's little evidence this approach has any effect.

HYPNOTHERAPIST
Anyone from an MD or RN to a psychologist or social worker may do hypnotherapy. Practitioners should also be certified by a professional organization like the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis (asch.net) or the Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis (sceh.us).

INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE DOCTOR
These are often licensed physicians who combine conventional and complementary therapies. Look for one who is board-certified in this combination, which is called integrative medicine. To search for a provider near you, go to www.credentialsmart.net/abps.

MASSAGE THERAPIST
Education and licensing requirements differ from state to state but usually call for several hundred hours of training and regular continuing education. See your state's requirements at amtamassage.org/state-regulations and look for local practitioners at amtamassage.org/find-massage-therapist.

NATUROPATH (ND OR NMD)
In about half of the states (check yours at aanmc.org/licensure), practitioners—who use approaches like herbs, supplements, homeopathy, and "detoxification"—must graduate from a four-year naturopathic school and pass a licensing exam. In states without these regulations, you can't be sure how a naturopath has been trained.

▼ THE JURY IS STILL OUT

Plant sterols and stanols These substances, found in many whole grains, fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds, and legumes, block LDL cholesterol absorption, says Rosenson. They're also added to certain margarines (Benecol) and to supplements such as Benecol Soft Chews and CholestOff. But you should get enough from a heart-healthy diet, and there's no proof yet that adding them to foods or taking them as supplements cuts heart disease risks, he says.

Coenzyme Q10 If you have heart failure, some studies suggest that supplements of this antioxidant–which the body naturally produces–are helpful: They may lower the likelihood of hospitalization and death from heart failure. But whether they help lower high blood pressure or cholesterol or ease the side effects of cholesterol drugs like statins is a question mark. "It falls into the category of it won't harm you, but we don't know that it will help you," says Rosenson.

Probiotics There's some evidence that probiotic supplements ("good" bacteria and yeasts) may reduce cholesterol. But we haven't yet determined which strains are effective, says Goldberg. For now, you may want to put probiotic-rich foods, like Greek yogurt and fermented foods like kimchi, in regular rotation in your diet.

▼ DON'T USE

Red yeast rice These supplements are basically unregulated statins, says Rosenson, referring to prescription cholesterol drugs. They contain monacolin k, which is identical to the active ingredient in some statins. "If you're already taking a statin, you could get too much," he says. In addition, a 2021 analysis of red yeast rice supplements from 37 brands found that 36 had high levels of a substance called citrinin, which can cause kidney damage.

Cold & Flu

▼ WHAT WORKS

Honey A tablespoon of this sweetener may help quell a cough, by soothing a sore throat and helping to moisten the mucous membranes in your mouth, says William Schaffner, MD, a professor of preventive medicine at the Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville. For instance, a 2021 meta-analysis published in BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine found that honey reduced both the frequency and severity of a cough.

Saline nasal irrigation Flushing your nose with mildly salty water temporarily relieves cold symptoms because it moistens your mucous membranes and helps flush out mucus, says Schaffner. You can use a saline spray or a neti pot, a small "vessel" with a long snout that you fill with distilled, sterile, or previously boiled salt water; saline sprays and neti pots are widely available at drugstores and online. For a neti pot, clean it well before its next use: "Otherwise you'll end up rinsing your nose next time with a whole lot of bacteria," Schaffner says. This strategy works well for more serious respiratory infections, too: A 2022 study published in the Ear, Nose & Throat Journal found that people at high risk for COVID-19 complications who used a saline nasal spray twice a day soon after testing positive were much less likely to need to be hospitalized. If you have a sore throat as well as a stuffy nose, gargling with salt water several times a day may soothe it.

▼ THE JURY IS STILL OUT

Vitamin C Supplements of C may ease cold symptoms, but not by a whole lot: A 2023 meta-analysis of 10 studies published in BMC Public Health found that at least 1 daily gram of vitamin C taken regularly seemed to decrease the severity of a cold by about 15 percent.

Vitamin D Some, but not all, studies suggest that daily supplements of the so-called sunshine vitamin may be protective against upper respiratory infections, if you're one of the many people who are deficient in it, Schaffner says. The likely reason the supplement may help: Low levels of D are linked to decreased immune system function.

Unstuffing Your Nose
Using a neti pot to rinse nasal passages with a saline solution helps clear mucus.

PHOTO: CARA BROSTROM/STOCKSY

Digestive Trouble

Zinc Sucking on zinc lozenges when cold symptoms first hit may help cut their duration, according to a 2024 Cochrane review of studies. But the authors say the research behind that finding is low-quality. So we may have to wait for additional research to get more clarity on zinc for cold relief. If you try these over-the-counter products, be aware that they can leave an unpleasant metallic taste in your mouth. Brushing your teeth or using mouthwash may help.

Probiotics These supplements may offer some protection, reducing the likelihood of an upper respiratory infection by about 24 percent, according to a 2022 Cochrane review. But there's not enough research yet to know for sure which strains are actually effective, says Schaffner. So you may want to stick with foods that naturally contain probiotics, like yogurt, kefir, and sauerkraut, for the time being.

▼ DON'T USE

Elderberry This supplement is reputed to be a flu (and cold) fighter, but a 2020 study published in the Journal of General Internal Medicine found no such benefits. In it, people who took elderberry extract four times daily for five days saw no difference in how long their flu lasted and how lousy they felt compared with those who got a placebo. Elderberry has also been promoted as a way to treat COVID-19, but there's no evidence for that, says the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health.

Echinacea While supplements of this plant (aka coneflower) have long been touted to both prevent and treat respiratory infections such as colds, studies don't bear that out, according to Schaffner. The last good research on it–a 2014 Cochrane review that looked at 24 randomized controlled trials–agrees: It concluded that echinacea didn't appear to have any cold-busting qualities.

▼ WHAT WORKS

Acupuncture Having this treatment for anywhere from two to eight weeks helped constipated folks get more regular in a 2020 meta-analysis. "It seems best to treat constipation, but some people find it beneficial for any sort of abdominal symptom," says William Chey, MD, chief of the division of gastroenterology at the University of Michigan Medical Center in Ann Arbor. "We've even added a GI acupuncturist to our practice." Check with your health insurer to see whether it covers acupuncture for such issues.

Yoga Doing yoga regularly appears to keep your digestive system running more smoothly. For instance, a 2021 study published in the Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies found that people between 60 and 75 who did yoga–no particular type was specified–three times a week for three months reported significant improvement in constipation (as a bonus, they also slept better). And adults with irritable bowel syndrome who did weekly online sessions of gentle hatha yoga for eight weeks said they had less abdominal pain, in a 2023 study in the American Journal of Gastroenterology.

Needle Therapy In acupuncture, thin needles are inserted into the body to reduce aches.

Gut-directed hypnotherapy This therapy teaches you how to divert your brain's attention from discomfort and relaxes the muscles and nerve endings in the gastrointestinal tract, says Chey. A 2020 review of 41 randomized controlled trials found that it helped relieve abdominal pain in people with IBS. "It seems to be about as effective as cognitive behavior therapy, which is really the gold standard when it comes to IBS therapies," Chey says. It's often covered by insurance for IBS.

▼ THE JURY IS STILL OUT

Turmeric Curcumin, a compound in this spice, may be as effective as a commonly used medication for curbing heartburn, according to a 2024 study in BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine. In the study, people who took turmeric supplements reported as much relief as those who took a standard dose of the drug omeprazole. But some other studies have found that turmeric increases GI upset, says Chey, so more research is needed.

Peppermint oil The American College of Gastroenterology's 2021 guidelines conditionally recommend this oil for the abdominal pain of irritable bowel syndrome, noting that it appears helpful but that more research is needed. If you're going to try it, take it in enteric coated capsules, says Chey. Uncoated ones can cause heartburn.

Probiotics While your digestive system needs these microbes, supplements aren't generally advised for GI trouble, says Chey: "We know gut bacteria plays a role in chronic constipation and diarrhea, and even conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome, but we don't have a good sense of the best probiotic strains." For now, it's best to focus on probiotics from foods like yogurt and sauerkraut.

▼ DON'T USE

Chamomile Though tea and supplements are said to soothe an upset stomach, there's no good evidence they do. And chamomile may trigger allergy symptoms if you're allergic to daisies, marigolds, mums, or ragweed.

Wormwood It may be dicey to use supplements and extracts of this herb–which are purported to relieve stomach pain: Some research suggests it may damage the nervous system (the brain, spinal cord, and nerves).

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

RISKY REMEDIES TO AVOID

In addition to several treatments mentioned earlier in this article—such as kratom, red yeast rice, St. John's wort, and wormwood—the following may harm your health. Our experts advise that you steer clear.

Weight loss supplements

You may see various over-the-counter products marketed as weight loss aids, such as Hydroxycut and Jacked Factory Burn XT. According to the National Institutes of Health's Office of Dietary Supplements, there's little evidence that weight loss supplements are effective. Plus, some may interact with medications, and a few may even cause harm. Last October, for instance, the Food and Drug Administration cautioned that the weight loss supplement Itcha XS contained unlisted antidepressants that should be only in prescription medications. Also in October, the FDA noted that the Body Shape Weight Loss System was found to contain sibutramine. This controlled substance was taken off the market in 2010 because it can substantially increase both blood pressure and heart rate.

Yohimbe

Avoid any supplements that contain this herb. While yohimbe is said by some to treat libido and erectile dysfunction problems, it can hike blood pressure and cause a rapid heart rate, along with panic attacks and liver and kidney issues. Also, be aware: Earlier this year, the FDA cautioned consumers not to use several sexual enhancement supplements on the market, after they were found to contain sildenafil (the active ingredient in the prescription drug Viagra).

Comfrey

Some say that this herb works to relieve cough, stomach problems, and chest pain, and it's even alleged to treat cancer. But comfrey has actually been linked to cancer as well as to liver damage. It's banned in oral form in the U.S. for those reasons, but it's still available online.

Kava

A plant that may come in supplement form (typically as a tablet or extract), kava is reputed to ease anxiety and insomnia. But it can cause liver damage and may reduce the effectiveness of prescription medications for conditions such as Parkinson's disease.

Detox and cleanses

These products may come in forms like capsules or liquids, or be marketed as programs where you take certain actions (such as fasting or eating or drinking specific foods or beverages, like juices). Typically, they're purported to help people rid themselves of unspecified "toxins," and often, to lose weight, too. But using these is rarely necessary, because your body naturally gets rid of toxins, says Amy Locke, MD, chief wellness officer and professor of family and preventive medicine at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. The FDA has also gone after some manufacturers for selling products that have harmful ingredients. For example, in 2019, the agency advised consumers not to use a product called Detox Plus after it was found to contain tadalafil, the active ingredient in the prescription erectile dysfunction drug Cialis. It could "lower blood pressure to dangerous levels," the agency said.

Chelation

This prescription therapy, where a drug called EDTA is delivered into the bloodstream via IV, is FDA-approved for a few specific medical issues, like lead poisoning. But it's also offered by some medical practitioners for other conditions, such as Alzheimer's disease, autism, cancer, and heart disease. You may see OTC chelation supplements for sale as well. Unapproved uses come with risks such as kidney damage, calcium deficiency, and low blood pressure, and the FDA cautions against it.

Ear candling

Promoted as a way to remove excess earwax and treat sinus infections, sore throats, colds, and the flu, this involves placing a hollow candle into your ear canal and then lighting it. But the American Academy of Otolaryngology warns against ear candling, noting that the practice can severely damage your ear drum and ear canal—by causing issues like burns and infections.

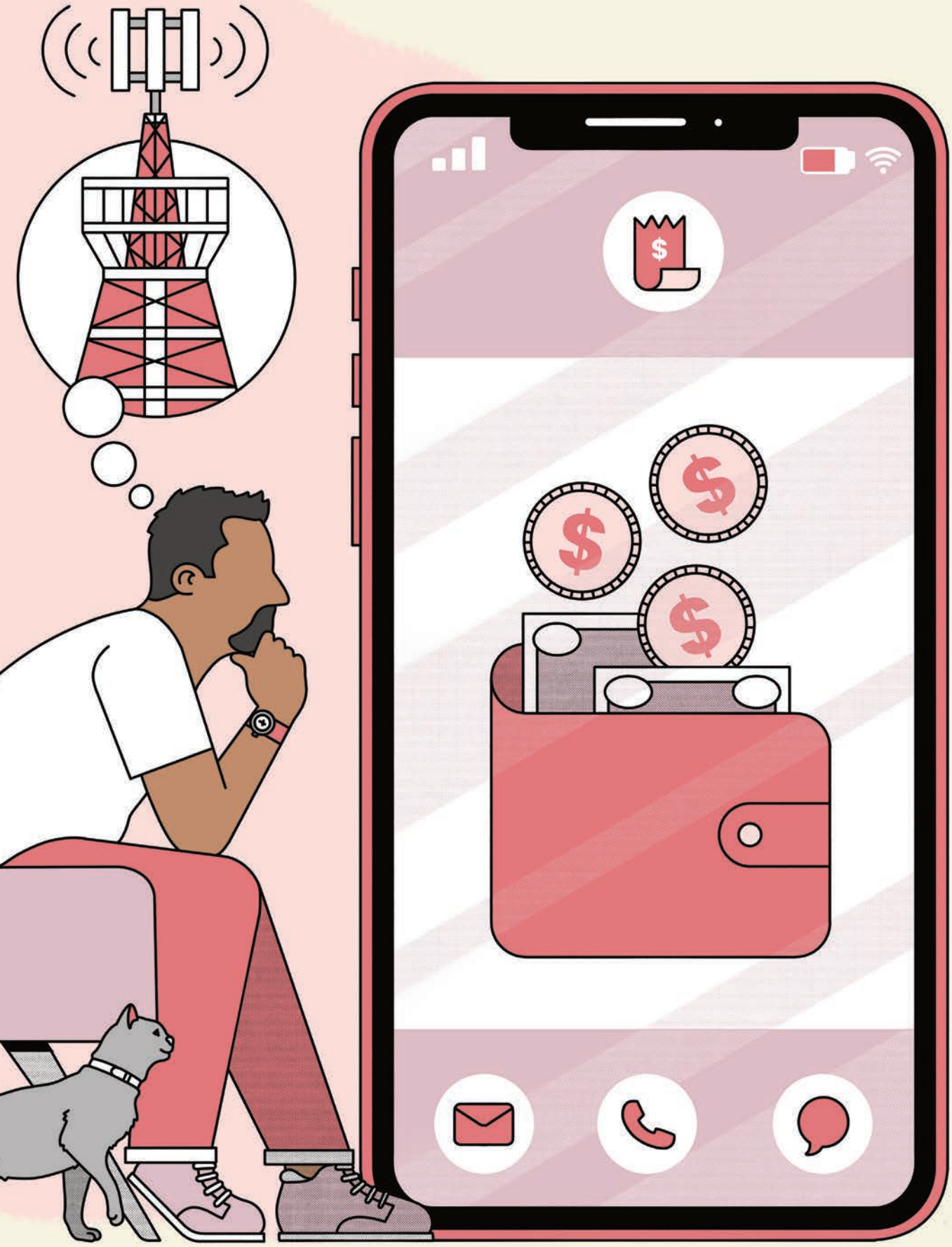
For more on risky supplements, go to **CR.org/riskysupplements**.

SAVE $500 ON CELL SERVICE THIS YEAR

Tired of paying a small fortune for your phone plan? This is the way to get a better deal from your current provider—or switch to a new one for a whole lot less.

by Courtney Lindwall

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANDREW JOYCE



IT'S HARD TO GET THROUGH modern life without a cell phone. And cell service has gotten expensive. The average American shells out around $135 a month for it, according to a 2024 survey from the global data and analytics company J.D. Power.

But there's a relatively easy way to shrink that by $40 or more—without giving up great reception and unlimited data.

The secret? Switch from AT&T, T-Mobile, or Verizon to a smaller provider like Consumer Cellular or Mint Mobile. Consumer Reports members who have done this said they're saving close to $500 a year.

In our member surveys, Consumer Cellular, Mint Mobile, and other smaller companies beat out big-name carriers for value and customer support. For overall satisfaction, they absolutely crushed AT&T and Verizon in particular, but they outshined T-Mobile as well. (See our ratings on page 45.)

While changing your provider may seem like a hassle, it actually isn't that complicated—if you follow our simple steps. You'll get to keep the same phone number and be able to make it happen without spending huge amounts of time on the phone or heading to a store.

Surprising Savings

You won't get low-budget cell service when you go with a budget provider. The reason? AT&T, Verizon, and T-Mobile spend big money to maintain their wireless networks, and, to recoup some costs, they then lease use of those networks to smaller providers. So if you switch, you can expect to get the same coverage—just at a lower price.

For example, Consumer Cellular, which uses AT&T's network, offers an unlimited plan with two lines for $65 a month (excluding taxes and fees). By comparison, a basic unlimited plan with two lines at AT&T costs $122 a month (plus taxes and fees).

One reason for the lower cost is that these budget providers, known as mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs), generally don't shower you with perks, such as access to streaming services and interest-free loans for new phones. They may also save money by providing customer service via phone or online chat instead of staffing and maintaining a coast-to-coast network of brick-and-mortar stores. While some, including Consumer Cellular and Cricket, do have physical locations, customers for other providers might need to go to an Apple Store or a Best Buy for face-to-face support.

These budget providers have one other disadvantage. When network traffic is heavy, the Big Three may slow the data speeds of customers from other carriers first. But even if that happens, you might not notice the difference. You'll still be able to send and receive texts and emails. It could just briefly limit your ability to stream your favorite TV show or appear on camera in the family Zoom call.

Can You Save Without Switching?

Let's say you're not ready to leave the carrier you're already using. Is there any way to shave a little something off your existing monthly fee? Cell phone bills are a bit harder to negotiate than other kinds of bills, says Brian Keaney, co-founder of the bill-negotiating service Billshark. The big-name providers enjoy such market dominance that they don't have much incentive to haggle with you. They use the same pricing nationwide and do their best not to deviate from it.

If you do call your carrier to negotiate, tell the representative you want to cancel your service, he says. This gets the call elevated to the retention department. Once there, you can ask for a one-time credit for being such a loyal customer. After that, ask the rep to help you examine other ways to reduce your bill.

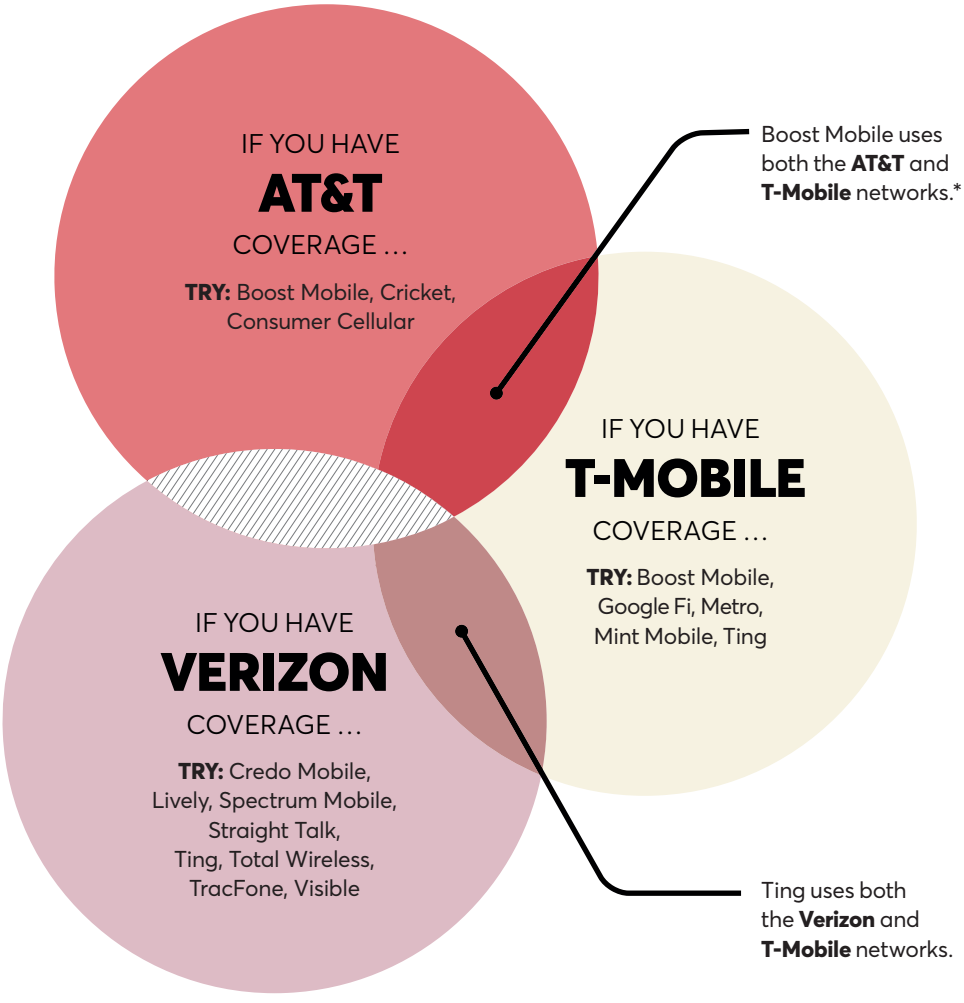
Typically, this involves downsizing your plan. When you first sign up, Keaney says, big-name providers often sell you on the priciest option, which includes perks you probably won't miss, such as a stockpile of hot spot data that lets you get your laptop online by wirelessly connecting it to your phone. But you're unlikely to need the most premium features. Consider whether a lower-tier option would still meet your needs.

Some providers also allow for mixing and matching within family plans: You might be able to save some money by placing one person in the highest tier with more perks, while another uses a lower tier.

And make sure you take advantage of all the no-brainer cost savings like enrolling in paperless and automatic billing and signing up for any available discounts, such as those for seniors, veterans, and teachers.

↓ FIND A NEW PROVIDER USING YOUR PREFERRED NETWORK

If you're happy with the coverage from your current provider, look for a small carrier using that same network. That way, you know service will remain reliable. Or if you're hoping to improve your coverage, ask neighbors to recommend a network.


IF YOU HAVE
AT&T
COVERAGE …
TRY: Boost Mobile, Cricket, Consumer Cellular
Boost Mobile uses both the AT&T and T-Mobile networks.*
IF YOU HAVE
T-MOBILE
COVERAGE …
TRY: Boost Mobile, Google Fi, Metro, Mint Mobile, Ting
IF YOU HAVE
VERIZON
COVERAGE …
TRY: Credo Mobile, Lively, Spectrum Mobile, Straight Talk, Ting, Total Wireless, TracFone, Visible
Ting uses both the Verizon and T-Mobile networks.

Get the Best Deal for You

Before you begin comparing plans, it helps to know how much data you use each month and which of the Big Three networks provides the best coverage in the area where you live.

→ ***Find out how much data you need.*** Premium plans from AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon can serve up far more data than an average person actually needs, with some promising 30 gigabytes or more per month in mobile hot spot data alone. If you're routinely connected to WiFi and you never use your phone to access internet service on your laptop, there's no reason to pay for all that.

By contrast, budget providers give you a more reasonable range of options—anywhere from 1 gigabyte to around 20 gigabytes of total data a month—in addition to unlimited plans. Better yet, some allow you to add data on an as-needed basis, which can be helpful if you're traveling and need more than usual. Ting, for example, lets you add a gigabyte of fast data for just $5 more and Google Fi has a plan that charges you $10 a month for each gigabyte of data you use. This lets you choose a less expensive plan and scale up when necessary.

To properly weigh the merits of those plans, you need to understand your typical data use. Fortunately, that information is readily available from your current provider. Your monthly billing statement lists data usage figures for each phone on your plan. And if you sign on to your account online, you can even see how much hot spot data you use.

Premium plans from both big and small carriers also offer more high-speed data, which is helpful for gamers or those who love streaming high-definition movies. Once you've used up your fast data allotment, you can be slowed down to 2G speeds, which are fine for certain basic activities but less so for data-intensive applications. So think through your family's needs. If you mostly use your phone for checking email, texting, and scrolling through Facebook while connected to WiFi, you likely only need a few gigabytes of data and can skip those premium data offers.

*Runs on own network, with support from roaming partners AT&T and T-Mobile.

→ ***Pick the best network for your home.*** As noted earlier, MVNOs (smaller providers) piggyback on the wireless networks owned by AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon to provide service.

If you get great reception with your current provider, it's smart to choose an MVNO that runs on the same network. If you're unhappy with the coverage in your area, look for a better alternative by asking your neighbors which service they use and whether they're happy with it. AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon provide ZIP code-based coverage maps on their websites, but they don't adequately identify the dead zones in certain spots.

Once you know which network is most reliable in your neighborhood, it's easy to determine which MVNOs make the most sense for you. (See page 43.) Consumer Cellular and Cricket run on AT&T's network, Mint Mobile and Google Fi run on T-Mobile's, and Ting runs on both T-Mobile's and Verizon's networks.

A few budget providers are actually owned by a major carrier. For instance, AT&T owns Cricket, T-Mobile owns Metro, and Verizon owns Visible. But as you can see from the ratings, the customers at smaller carriers still tend to be more satisfied.

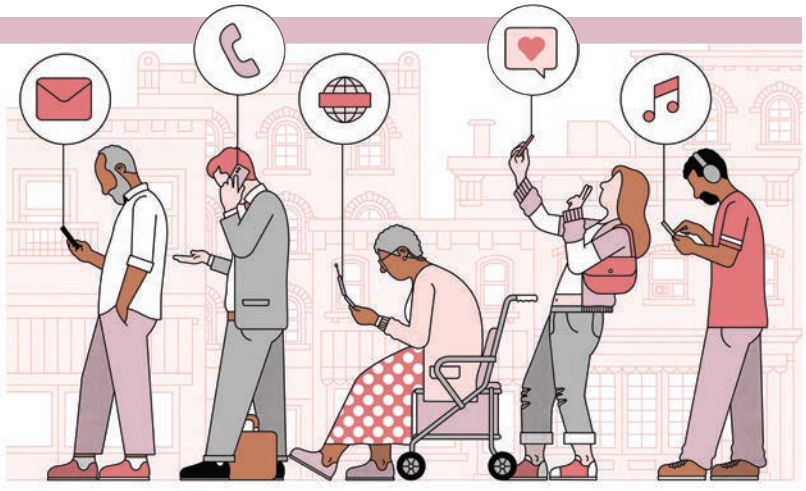
→ ***Consider perks and discounts.*** Certain premium plans offer additional benefits, such as streaming services or cloud storage at a discount. Cricket, for example, includes a subscription to Max (with ads) in its $60-per-month unlimited plan, which might allow you to cancel your streaming service. Providers may also offer discounts if you agree to less frequent payment schedules. Mint Mobile, for example, has three-, six-, and 12-month bundles. You can pay $360 up front for the year (which breaks down to the equivalent of $30 a month).

How to Change Your Service

If you plan to bring your phone number with you, don't cancel your current service until you're enrolled in a new one. The sign-up process is fairly simple. In fact, a customer service rep from your chosen provider can quickly walk you through it over the phone. If you'd like to bring your

PROVIDERS WITH GREAT PLANS

These low-cost options from our highest-rated providers can fit your unique needs—offering hundreds of dollars in savings per year compared with the Big Three cell companies. The prices listed here are for a single phone line.



If you don't use much data and want to save big …

MINT MOBILE
$15/month

5GB of data (offered as a 12-month plan)

If you need unlimited everything …

TING
$45/month

Unlimited calling, texting, and data

If you want a plan that offers more flexibility …

GOOGLE FI
$20/month

Plus $10 more for each gigabyte of data you use

CR's top-rated provider for overall satisfaction …

CONSUMER CELLULAR
$50/month

Unlimited calling, texting, and data

For satisfying service and fun extras …

CRICKET
$60/month

Unlimited data and included Max subscription (with ads)

phone with you, too, here are a few things to consider.

Is your phone paid off? If you've been paying monthly installments to your carrier, you'll need to settle up before you can switch services.

Is your phone unlocked? This allows you to use it on another network. A service provider is required to unlock your device from its network—either remotely or in person—as long as the device is paid off and your account is in good standing. You can check your phone's status yourself. On an iPhone, for example, head to Settings > General > About, and scroll down to "Carrier Lock." It will say either "SIM locked" or "No SIM restrictions."

Is your phone compatible with your new provider? Most of today's smartphones can work on any network as long as they're unlocked, but you can still confirm compatibility by entering your device's IMEI—a unique number found in your phone's settings—on a provider's website or by asking a customer service rep.

Does your phone use a digital or physical SIM card? You'll need to activate a SIM card for each phone on the new plan. Most models now use digital eSIM cards, which can be activated remotely by the new carrier. Some phones still require a physical SIM card, which you insert into a small slot on the device. The new carrier can mail it to you or have you buy one at a retailer like Best Buy or Target.

With those items addressed, you're ready to activate service with your new provider. With most budget carriers, you can easily do this on the company's website or over the phone with the help of a customer service agent, who will set up your new account. Expect to have your new line up and running within just a few minutes. And you're now set to reap the rewards—hundreds of dollars in savings and maybe even better service, too.

Provider	Overall Satisfaction Score	Survey Results			
		Value	Customer support	Data	Reception
Consumer Cellular Runs on AT&T network	83	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼
Mint Mobile Runs on T-Mobile network	72	⏫	🟡	🔼	🟡
Ting Runs on T-Mobile and Verizon networks	71	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼
Cricket Runs on AT&T network	63	🔼	🟡	🔼	🔼
Google Fi Runs on T-Mobile network	62	🔼	🟡	🔼	🟡
Spectrum Mobile Runs on Verizon network	58	🔼	🟡	🟡	🟡
Credo Mobile Runs on Verizon network	58	🟡	–	🔼	🔼
Visible Runs on Verizon network	57	🔼	⏬	🟡	🟡
Metro Runs on T-Mobile network	55	🔼	🟡	🟡	🟡
T-Mobile	54	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡
TracFone Runs on Verizon network	53	🔼	⏬	🟡	🟡
Xfinity Mobile Runs on Comcast Xfinity network	45	🟡	⏬	🟡	🟡
Lively Runs on Verizon network	42	🔽	–	–	🟡
Straight Talk Runs on Verizon network	42	🟡	⏬	🟡	🟡
Boost Mobile [1]	40	🟡	⏬	🟡	🟡
Total Wireless Runs on Verizon network	40	🟡	–	🟡	🟡
UScellular [2]	36	⏬	🟡	🟡	🟡
Verizon Wireless	31	⏬	🔽	🟡	🟡
AT&T	28	⏬	🔽	🟡	🟡

HOW WE SURVEY: The ratings are based on a fall 2023 survey of 51,858 U.S. Consumer Reports members. The Overall Satisfaction Score is derived from member ratings of value, customer support, data service, and cellular reception from their cell service provider. A gray dash (–) indicates insufficient sample size to provide a rating.

⏬ 🔽 🟡 🔼 ⏫
WORSE — BETTER

[1] Runs on own network, with support from roaming partners AT&T and T-Mobile.
[2] Runs on own network, with support from undisclosed roaming partners.

HOW TO FIND A

Great Home Health Aide

Having the right person can make caring for a loved one much easier. Read on for your options, and smart ways to cover the costs.

BY PENELOPE WANG • ILLUSTRATIONS BY BARBARA GIBSON

FIVE YEARS AGO Judy and Jack Rothman, who live in Los Angeles, realized they needed to bring in a professional caregiver. Jack, now age 97, had serious health issues that Judy, now 92, struggled to manage on her own. "It became very difficult, and I knew I needed help," Judy says.

Fortunately, when he was working, Jack had been a professor of social work, so the couple was able to tap a number of knowledgeable contacts. Through one, they were put in touch with Lynn Anderson, a home health aide. Anderson now manages the couple's care, including shopping, cooking, and health needs. Plus she oversees fill-in caregivers when they are necessary. "We've really come to rely on Lynn, and we enjoy her company," Judy says.

Chances are, you or someone close to you will need help at home, whether it's for a few weeks, like after a hip replacement surgery, or for a longer period, as in the case of a chronic illness. In fact, 7 out of 10 Americans turning 65 this year will require long-term care at some point in their lives, according to research from the Administration for Community Living, a division of the Department of Health and Human Services.

But how do you manage the daunting tasks of finding, managing, and affording that person? Read on for important advice.

Jack and Judy Rothman with their home health aide, Lynn Anderson.

Figure Out the Type of Care You Need

Before launching a search, think about the kind of assistance you need and for how long. "If someone is having surgery and needs help for a week, that's one thing, but someone with dementia who can't be left alone will have different needs," says Amy Goyer, family and caregiving expert at AARP and author of "Juggling Life, Work, and Caregiving" (American Bar Association, 2015).

Then look for a caregiver with the appropriate skills. These are the three broad categories of help; the labels and certifications may vary depending on where you live.

Personal Care Aides/Companions

These caregivers aren't licensed, but they can help you with shopping, cooking, light housekeeping, and transportation. They can also provide companionship.

Home Health Aides

In addition to the tasks of personal care aides, these caregivers can monitor the patient's health and assist with activities of daily living (ADLs), such as bathing, dressing, and eating. To qualify, these aides undergo training, though the specific number of hours of training and other requirements vary by state.

Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs)

CNAs can provide the same services as home health aides, such as help with daily living, but are required to have additional training that allows them to perform some medical tasks, like changing dressings, checking vital signs, and monitoring nutrition. They work under the supervision of a licensed nurse or doctor.

If you need regular medical care, as well as assistance with ADLs or help with shopping, you may want to hire more than one type of caregiver, Goyer says. For example, in addition to homemaking help from personal care aides, you might arrange for a registered nurse to check in once or twice a week to administer medication or address other medical needs.

Where to Find Help

It can be challenging to find a qualified caregiver, especially if you've never done it before and don't know what to expect, says Christina Irving, client services director at Family Caregiver Alliance, a nonprofit group. But you have options. Here are the three main strategies, along with the pros and cons.

Go Through an Agency

With a home healthcare agency, you benefit from convenience and support. The agency will find and schedule the caregivers, do background checks, and handle the paperwork and legal requirements, including taxes, workers' compensation, and liability insurance. If a caregiver can't show up, the agency will find a substitute.

But you'll have less control over the aides assigned to you, who may rotate on a regular basis. That can make it hard to build a relationship and ensure that your loved one's care needs are met. You'll probably pay more than if you hire someone on your own because agencies need to charge higher rates to cover their overhead, Goyer says. To find a home care agency, ask your friends and family for recommendations. You can also contact your local Area Agency on Aging, which can direct you to resources. (More on that below.)

Hire on Your Own

This way you can choose a caregiver who seems to be the best fit for your

PHOTOS, PREVIOUS SPREAD: GARRETT SUTTON (PORTRAIT); GETTY IMAGES (FOLDING LAUNDRY)

Hiring an Aide? What to Ask.

To find the right caregiver, it's best to conduct multiple interviews with candidates. "Seeing someone once may not tell you enough," says Danielle Miura, a certified financial planner in Ripon, Calif., with a focus on caregiving needs. The conversations can give you a clearer idea of the caregiver's personality and attitude. Here are key topics to discuss.

Do they have credentials, and are they valid and up to date?
States have different requirements regarding how much training and what kind of credentials caregivers need to have, with many requiring certified nursing assistants, for example, to pass an exam to demonstrate competency. So make sure you know what's required where you live. (To find the rules in your area, check with your local Area Agency on Aging.)

Is the caregiver a U.S. citizen or otherwise legally permitted to work in the U.S.? And are they willing to undergo a background check?
Noncitizens with green cards or work visas can legally work in this country as caregivers. But undocumented immigrants almost certainly do not have the government-issued identification they would need in order to undergo a background check and thus can't be fully vetted.

needs. And you'll probably pay less per hour. But it's your job to find a replacement if the caregiver can't come in. You'll also need to do the paperwork, including drawing up a contract; take care of taxes and insurance; and do background checks.

Many families end up finding caregivers through word of mouth. Some employers may offer eldercare referral services as a benefit. Another option is to use a private care registry, a matchmaking service that puts you in touch with caregivers seeking work. Some services also do background checks and help with paperwork, says Lori Dahan, president of the Private Care Association, a trade group; go to privatecare.org to find registries in your area.

Two years ago Sue Kinkel, an 80-year-old widow in Phoenix, used a caregiver referral service to help her find an aide to assist with shopping, cleaning, and other tasks. Her personal care aide, Ashley Roberts, 44, has been working with her since. "We're now really good friends," Kinkel says. "She drives me to appointments, and we have lunch or shop afterwards." Ashley adds, "She records TV shows in the evening that we can watch together the next day."

How many hours of work are they looking for, and what sort of flexibility do they have?
Many caregivers require a minimum number of hours per day, particularly if they have a long commute. But some may be open to working shorter hours, perhaps to fill in before taking on a longer commitment.

How many weeks of vacation do they expect?
It's important to discuss the caregiver's requirements for time off, to avoid a last-minute scramble for a substitute. (Also discuss whether time off is paid or unpaid.)

Have they worked with a client with needs similar to yours or your loved one's?
You will want the caregiver to have experience with your family member's needs, particularly if they have serious health issues or can be hard to please. If your loved one prefers certain foods, for example, is the caregiver willing to prepare them?

Do they have examples of how they improved a client's living situation or helped them get a problem fixed?
Ask the candidate to describe how they helped clients resolve issues or improved their care, says Tim Husted, senior vice president at CareLinx, a caregiver hiring platform. Perhaps they cleared away rugs that posed a fall risk, or helped a client call an insurance company to get a paperwork issue taken care of.

What do they find satisfying about the job?
You'll want to hear about their reasons for becoming a caregiver and about the aspects of the work they most enjoy and find gratifying. "I would look for someone who really enjoys helping another person and brings compassion to the job," says Lynn Anderson, a home health aide in Los Angeles, who interviews fill-in caregivers for her client. "You don't want someone who is just doing it for a paycheck."

Bring In a Care Manager

Another option is to hire an aging-life-care expert, also called a geriatric care manager. These specialists, who often have backgrounds in social work or healthcare, can help you assess your loved one's needs, manage the caregiving staffing, often through an agency, and help with problems as they occur. These services can be especially helpful if you're trying to help a family member from a distance or if you can't visit regularly. If you're not sure how to get started, you can hire a geriatric care manager for a consultation and to get information about options and resources in your area, says Kate Granigan, president of the board of directors of the Aging Life Care Association.

What It All Costs

Only a few government or insurance resources pay for long-term care. Still, it's worth checking to see what may be available to you, or if you can qualify down the line. Here are the main options to consider.

Medicare

This coverage pays for only part-time home care for short periods of time and only if ordered by a doctor. You will need to use a Medicare-certified home care agency. Some Medicare Advantage plans may provide additional coverage, but the benefits are generally limited.

Veterans Benefits

Veterans may qualify for home care services. To find out whether you're eligible, go to va.gov and search for "home care."

Long-Term-Care Insurance

Few people have long-term-care insurance, but if you do, it can help cover some of your costs. Check the policy's elimination period; most plans don't kick in for 30 days or longer after the need for care starts. And be sure to understand which specific services are covered, as well as how claims are reimbursed, says Steve Gaito, a certified financial planner in Raleigh, N.C.

"We're really good friends," says Sue Kinkel, 80, of her aide, Ashley Roberts. The two often shop and watch TV together.

Medicaid

If you are on Medicaid, you may be eligible for funded home care services through so-called self-directed care. And in some states, you might be able to bring in a family member as a paid caregiver. Bear in mind, if you think you or your loved one will need Medicaid coverage, eligibility rules generally have a five-year look-back period; it can be helpful to consult an elder-law attorney familiar with the policies in your state.

Out of Pocket

If you're paying for care on your own, median rates run $33 an hour for a home health aide, according to a 2023 survey by Genworth, which is up 7 percent over the previous year. Those amounts vary depending on regional costs and availability of caregivers, with median rates running as low as $22 an hour in Mississippi and as high as $40 an hour in New Hampshire and Vermont. In general, personal care aides are paid a bit less, about $30 an hour.

If You Need More Info

Support and information may be available from local government and nonprofit groups, as well as from community networks. Many groups offer free or low-cost help that can supplement in-home care.

Your first stop is your local Area Agency on Aging, says Danielle Miura, a certified financial planner in Ripon, Calif., who focuses on caregiver needs. The Area Agency can direct you to organizations that provide services for older Americans—everything from home care assistance to home-delivered meals. (Depending on your income, you may be asked to pay a sliding-scale fee for some services.) To find the agency near you, go to eldercare.acl.gov.

You can also find resources at the websites of the Family Caregiver Alliance and the Caregiver Action Network. And the AARP has listings of services in Family Caregiver Resource Guides for each state.

For more direct community assistance, you can turn to websites such as Lotsa Helping Hands and CaringBridge. These platforms allow friends, family, and volunteers to schedule times to drop by or bring meals, or perhaps take the person to medical appointments.

And if you're fortunate enough to live in a NORC, or naturally occurring retirement community, you may have some built-in support. NORCs are neighborhoods with a large proportion of older residents, perhaps an urban apartment building complex or a subdivision. NORCs typically offer services such as meal drop-offs and rides to doctor appointments. To see whether you live in one, contact your local Area Agency on Aging.

PHOTO, THIS PAGE: ASHLEY ROBERTS; PHOTO, FACING PAGE: DREAMSTIME (FACILITY EXTERIOR)

When Assisted Living Is Needed

Nearly 8 out of 10 older adults would rather stay in their own home than move, according to a 2022 AARP survey. But that's not always possible. Depending on your loved one's needs, your family member might find an assisted living facility or nursing home more affordable, and it may provide more care and medical oversight than you can manage on your own, says Steven Barlam, CEO of JFS Care in Los Angeles. These signs may indicate that it's time to consider a move.

You are paying a lot for a full schedule of care.
Eight to 10 hours of care a day, seven days a week, can easily run $120,000 a year or more. That's almost twice the median cost for a one-bedroom apartment in assisted living, which averages roughly $64,200, according to a 2023 survey by Genworth, while a one-bedroom in a skilled nursing facility is $116,800.

Constant medical monitoring is required.
It may be increasingly difficult to meet your loved one's health needs. Perhaps he or she has a complex medical condition, such as Parkinson's or coronary heart disease, that calls for frequent nursing attention and oversight.

Severe dementia is raising risks.
The family member may be increasingly prone to wandering or acting out, making it difficult to maintain safety and posing a challenge to family members as well as at-home caregivers.

Two people are needed to get the loved one out of bed safely.
If more than one caregiver needs to be present to transfer your family member to a wheelchair or to supervise toileting or a shower, that will raise costs and risks.

The home cannot be made accessible.
For those with mobility issues, a home with stairs or a bathroom that lacks adaptive features, such as a no-step shower, presents a major risk of a fall.

Your loved one has few opportunities to see people on a regular basis.
Perhaps lack of mobility, or distance from family members and friends, is leaving your loved one isolated. That could affect their mental health.

Your family member's needs are escalating and may surpass your ability to provide care.
"There can be a tipping point where you can't manage the care or the costs," says Kate Granigan of the Aging Life Care Association. So to avoid a last-minute scramble, it is important to do some advance research on alternatives and have a plan in place.

THE TRUTH ABOUT ENERGY BARS

Which ones give you a healthy, filling boost—and which are just high-calorie, sugar-filled snacks? Read on to get the lowdown.

BY SHARON LIAO • PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREGORY REID

Energy bars have come a long way since they took off in the 1980s. Early brands like PowerBar and Clif Bar were marketed as workout fuel for athletes, quickly followed by bars by Atkins and ZonePerfect designed to help with weight loss. Now, they're not just found in gyms and health food stores; they've gone mainstream, available in just about every gas station snack aisle, supermarket, and drugstore for anyone looking for a healthy snack or an on-the-go meal. You may have a bar in your kitchen, office, or purse right now. About 40 percent of people say they eat one a few times a week, according to Mintel, a market research agency.

Looking at their wrappers, most bars seem like they'd be good for you. Certainly better than a Snickers or a Payday, right? But many don't deliver the benefits you might expect. Even some of the ones with health claims like "high in protein" are nothing more than glorified candy bars, says Natalie Allen, RD, a clinical associate professor of nutrition and team dietitian at Missouri State University in Springfield. So how do you know which ones will give you a healthy boost of energy–and taste good? To help you shop, CR has tested 31 popular bars for nutrition and taste, so you can take our recommendations to the store with you.

NATURE VALLEY
FRUIT & NUT
CRANBERRY & POMEGRANATE
LÄRABAR
TRAIL MIX BAR
PEANUT BUTTER & JELLY
CHOCOLATE FUDGE BROWNIE
plant-based protein
10 G PROTEIN
gomacro
MACROBAR
protein decadence
dark chocolate + almonds
organic • vegan • gluten-free
NET WT. 2.3 OZ (65g)
NATURE VALLEY
OATMEAL SQUARES
CINNAMON SUGAR
NET WT 1.24 OZ (35g)
RXBAR
No B.S.
3 Egg Whites
6 Almonds
5 Cashews
MADEGOOD
MORNINGS
Soft Baked Oat Bar
NET WT. 1.06 OZ (30g)
NEW!
ORGANIC SNACK BAR
DAVE'S killer BREAD
OAT-RAGEOUS HONEY ALMOND
22g WHOLE GRAINS
NET WT 1.75 OZ (50g)
ORGANIC
jonesbar
PB AND J
ONLY 5 INGREDIENTS
KIND
SEEDS & FRUIT & NUTS
STRAWBERRY SUNFLOWER SEED
WITH ALMONDS & PEANUTS
NET WT. 1.4 OZ (40g) BAR
DAVE'S killer BREAD
AMPED-UP
PEANUT BUTTER CHOCOLATE CHUNK
PROTEIN BAR
CHOCOLATE DOUGH
NATURALLY AND ARTIFICIALLY FLAVORED
20 grams OF PROTEIN · no ADDED SUGAR
Barebells
NET WT. 1.94 oz (55 g)
88 ACRES
BRIGHT 'N' TANGY
TRIPLE BERRY CRUMBLE
SEED + OAT BAR
patter bar
FRUIT + NUT + SEED
100% WHOLE FOOD BAR
BORN IN DENVER
KIND
HEALTHY GRAINS
5 SUPER GRAINS
100% WHOLE GRAINS
20g PER BAR
GLUTEN FREE
THUNDERBIRD
AN GOJI PISTACHIO
REAL FOOD UNREAL TASTE
CLIF
BUILT WITH ORGANIC
BUILDERS
PROTEIN
20 GRAMS
PROTEIN BAR
CHOCOLATE
KIND

What Gives You Energy, Anyway?

There's no special ingredient in these bars that supplies energy. That's because energy really means calories, which is a measure of how much a food or drink fuels the body. "Calories can come from carbohydrates, protein, or fat," says Leslie Bonci, MPH, RD, a sports dietitian who has worked with the Kansas City Chiefs, the WNBA, and the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre.

Your body breaks down carbs faster than protein or fat. All carbs are converted to glucose, a sugar that enters the bloodstream and is used by cells for energy, says Bonci. Simple carbs, such as sugar and white flour, are broken down fastest of all. That can be helpful if you're doing an extremely demanding activity, like running a marathon, because that can deplete your cells' existing glucose. Eating a quickly digested carb can replenish it, giving you the push you need to keep going.

Most people don't need that kind of energy rush on a normal day. Simple carbs can make your blood sugar level rise rapidly. But it falls just as quickly, because your body pumps out insulin to sweep the glucose into cells. This sugar crash can leave you feeling tired and hungry, says Allen.

What you really need most of the time is the sustained energy that comes from carbs combined with fiber, protein, and fat. Those slow the release of glucose into the bloodstream and keep blood sugar levels steadier, Allen says.

The Good Stuff in These Bars

Many bars serve up a combination of carbs, fiber, protein, and fat, but not all of them use wholesome ingredients to get there. For the healthiest picks, look for bars made mostly from unprocessed foods, such as whole grains, nuts, seeds, and dried fruit, says Amy Keating, RD, the CR dietitian who oversaw our testing. Those ingredients are usually more nutrient-packed than their processed counterparts, such as protein powders and added sugars (see "Ingredients to Avoid," on page 56, for more on those).

If you're buying a grain-based bar, check that it's made with whole grains, such as oats or quinoa. "Whole grains

THE BEST (& WORST) BARS

To make it easier for our testers to compare the bars fairly, we grouped them into three categories based on the ingredients they focus on: The categories are fruit and nuts or seeds; whole grains; and protein. (None of these categories is better than another. There are healthy and not-so-good options in each.) They're ranked here by nutrition score, followed by taste. Higher nutrition scores went to those bars with more whole-food ingredients and lower amounts of added sugars, sodium, and saturated fat. Those with the same scores are listed alphabetically. Recommended bars scored at least 4 (out of 5) for nutrition and taste and had no processed protein or fiber. The nutritional information provided here is for a single bar.

FRUIT & NUT OR SEED BARS

With ingredients like almonds, pumpkin seeds, and fruits, these bars can have a satisfying, sometimes crunchy, "real food" texture.

Jonesbar PB and J
$2.80 (1.7 oz.)

This date-based bar is soft and chewy with some crunch from chopped peanuts. The jammy strawberry and peanut flavors make it taste like a PB&J.

CALORIES **190**
SATURATED FAT **1.5 g**
CARBS **25 g** | FIBER **4 g**
ADDED SUGARS **0 g**
PROTEIN **6 g**
SODIUM **40 mg**

NUTRITION TASTE

Patterbar Clean Energy Bar Fruit + Nut + Seed
$3.75 (1.75 oz.)

Packed with dates, cherries, sunflower and pumpkin seeds, walnuts, almonds, and coconut, this bar has a complex flavor and a good soft, chewy texture.

CALORIES **220**
SATURATED FAT **2 g**
CARBS **27 g** | FIBER **4 g**
ADDED SUGARS **0 g**
PROTEIN **5 g**
SODIUM **70 mg**

NUTRITION TASTE

88 Acres Seed + Oat Bar Triple Berry Crumble
$2.00 (1.6 oz.)

This bar is full of chewy pumpkin and sunflower seeds. Cinnamon and maple syrup give it depth, and it has a nice balance of sweetness and salt.

CALORIES **190**
SATURATED FAT **1 g**
CARBS **23 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **7 g**
PROTEIN **6 g**
SODIUM **10 mg**

NUTRITION TASTE

PREVIOUS SPREAD: PROP STYLING BY MEGUMI EMOTO

WORSE — BETTER

CR RECOMMENDED

are an excellent base," says Allen. "They contain carbs and fiber, which keep blood sugar levels steady and help you feel full for longer." Whole grains also reduce inflammation and harmful LDL cholesterol, which protects the heart: Getting at least three servings a day may reduce the risk of heart disease by 22 percent, according to a 2016 BMJ study.

But most Americans don't eat that many whole grains. If you're among them, an energy bar like the Kind Healthy Grains Oats & Honey bar, with 20 grams of whole grains per bar, would count as about one serving.

Many energy bars contain nuts, nut butters, and seeds. Don't worry about their fat and calorie content. Research shows that eating these foods regularly prevents weight gain and may even help you shed some pounds. The protein, fiber, and fat in nuts and seeds can fend off hunger. Plus, fat adds flavor, says Bonci. "Without it, biting into an energy bar can feel like eating the bottom of a running shoe."

What's more, each nut and seed contains different vitamins and minerals. For example, almonds supply potassium and iron, an energy-boosting mineral, and they're a big part of many of the bars in our tests, including Larabar Cherry Pie and Patterbar Clean Energy Fruit + Nut + Seed. And walnuts, hemp, and chia seeds are some of the few plant-based sources of omega-3 fatty acids, healthy fats tied to heart and brain health.

To sweeten their flavor, many bars include dried fruits like dates and cherries. Although dried fruits are high in sugar, they naturally contain fiber, vitamins, and antioxidants, Allen says. That makes them a healthier sweetener than added sugars.

With all of those good-for-you ingredients, should you make energy bars part of your daily routine? It's perfectly okay if you enjoy snacking on them and the one you choose doesn't add a lot of extra calories to your day. Energy bars can also work as an occasional meal, and if you have to choose between a healthy bar and nothing, the bar is better. But you can eat most bars in a few quick bites, so they may not be as satiating as something that takes longer to eat. For instance, you'll probably feel more satisfied after a bowl of oatmeal topped with fresh fruit and nuts than you would after eating a bar.

Larabar Trail Mix Bar Peanut Butter & Jelly
$2.30 (1.06 oz.)

The texture is tender yet slightly dense and crunchy. Cranberries and raisins give this bar a little sweetness, and it has a big toasted peanut flavor.

CALORIES **150**
SATURATED FAT **1 g**
CARBS **16 g** | FIBER **2 g**
ADDED SUGARS **4 g**
PROTEIN **4 g**
SODIUM **95 mg**

NUTRITION ▲ TASTE ▲

Thunderbird Pecan Goji Pistachio
$2.75 (1.7 oz.)

Dates and goji berries give this bar a sweet-tart flavor. It's nutty with almonds, pecans, and pistachios, and soft but not sticky.

CALORIES **220**
SATURATED FAT **1.5 g**
CARBS **19 g** | FIBER **4 g**
ADDED SUGARS **0 g**
PROTEIN **4 g**
SODIUM **220 mg**

NUTRITION ▲ TASTE ▲

Larabar Cherry Pie
$1.80 (1.7 oz.)

A chewy, dense bar, it has almond bits and a pleasant tartness from the dried cherries. But in one round of tasting, the nuts didn't taste as fresh.

CALORIES **200**
SATURATED FAT **0.5 g**
CARBS **28 g** | FIBER **4 g**
ADDED SUGARS **0 g**
PROTEIN **4 g**
SODIUM **0 mg**

NUTRITION ▲ TASTE –

Kind Pomegranate Blueberry Pistachio[1]
$2.10 (1.4 oz.)

This bar has plenty of large, crunchy roasted almonds and other nuts, but it's quite sticky. It has flavors of fruit and honey.

CALORIES **160**
SATURATED FAT **1 g**
CARBS **20 g** | FIBER **5 g**
ADDED SUGARS **5 g**
PROTEIN **5 g**
SODIUM **20 mg**

NUTRITION – TASTE ▲

Kind Seeds Fruit & Nuts Strawberry Sunflower Seed[1]
$1.60 (1.4 oz.)

With jammy-tasting strawberry and cranberry pieces, this bar is moderately sweet. The nuts and seeds taste fresh and add crunch.

CALORIES **190**
SATURATED FAT **3 g**
CARBS **17 g** | FIBER **6 g**
ADDED SUGARS **5 g**
PROTEIN **5 g**
SODIUM **35 mg**

NUTRITION – TASTE ▲

Nature Valley Fruit & Nut Bar Cranberry & Pomegranate[2]
$0.90 (1.1 oz.)

This is a very sweet granola-type bar that is mostly oats and rice puffs with some bits of dried fruit and nuts. It's somewhat dry and tough.

CALORIES **130**
SATURATED FAT **0 g**
CARBS **24 g** | FIBER **2 g**
ADDED SUGARS **6 g**
PROTEIN **2 g**
SODIUM **75 mg**

NUTRITION – TASTE –

PHOTOS: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS (9)

[1] Contains processed protein or fiber. [2] Sold only in multipacks.

Ingredients to Avoid

Not all bars are created equal. Look out for the following:

▶ **TOO MANY CALORIES.** Even the healthiest bars can pack in a lot of calories. Those in our tests ranged from 90 to 340 calories, but some others clock in at 400 calories or more. If you're eating the bar as a meal or exercising a lot, you may need a bar with 200 to 400 calories, Allen says. If you're not, the extra calories can lead to weight gain.

▶ **ADDED SUGAR.** The American Heart Association says 25 grams is the daily added sugar threshold for women (36 grams for men). Too much added sugar raises the risk for weight gain, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. The bars we tested ranged from 0 to 17 grams of added sugars. Keating suggests choosing a bar with no more than 7 grams. Natural sources of added sugars, such as concentrated fruit juices and honey, aren't much better than sugar and syrups. "They may contain some nutrients, but they still count as added sugar," Keating says.

On the flip side, take a second glance at bars with zero added sugar. Some of them are smart choices because they get their sweetness from dried fruit, but others use artificial sweeteners. Although scientists are still studying the effects of sugar substitutes, many are linked with health issues, such as cardiovascular disease.

▶ **PROCESSED PROTEIN.** When it comes to protein, many assume the more in a bar, the better for building muscle and losing weight. But that's not always the case. It's important to know where that protein comes from. Bars with a lot of protein (such as Clif Builders Chocolate Protein Bar, with 20 grams) are typically pumped up with processed protein, like soy or pea powders. Often called isolates or concentrates, these proteins are extracted from their original food, so they don't contain other nutrients, says Keating. If a protein powder is the first or second ingredient on a bar's ingredients list, that's where much of the bar's protein comes from.

Bars made with whole foods, such as eggs, nuts, or seeds, won't have as much protein, and that's okay. The daily recommendation is 0.36 gram per pound of body weight, and most

WHOLE-GRAIN BARS

All of these bars are made with oats, which is a healthy whole grain. Their texture can be crispy, crumbly, or chewy.

Kind Healthy Grains Oats & Honey with Toasted Coconut
$0.85 (1.2 oz.)

A mix of oats, quinoa, and rice puffs gives this bar a light, crispy texture. It's moderately sweet with some coconut and honey flavor.

CALORIES **150**
SATURATED FAT **1.5 g**
CARBS **23 g** | FIBER **2 g**
ADDED SUGARS **6 g**
PROTEIN **3 g**
SODIUM **95 mg**

NUTRITION ^ TASTE ^

MadeGood Mornings Soft Baked Oat Bar Blueberry[2]
$0.90 (1.06 oz.)

If you like a soft cookielike texture, this one's for you. The blueberry flavor is strong but a bit perfumey.

CALORIES **120**
SATURATED FAT **1 g**
CARBS **20 g** | FIBER **2 g**
ADDED SUGARS **4 g**
PROTEIN **2 g**
SODIUM **85 mg**

NUTRITION ^ TASTE !

Bob's Red Mill Bob's Bar Peanut Butter Honey & Oats
$1.70 (1.76 oz.)

"Must love peanut butter," one of our tasters said about this dense, chewy bar. Along with a big peanut taste, it has a balanced sweet and salty flavor.

CALORIES **220**
SATURATED FAT **1.5 g**
CARBS **26 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **9 g**
PROTEIN **8 g**
SODIUM **110 mg**

NUTRITION ! TASTE ^

GoMacro MacroBar Sunny Uplift Cherries + Berries
$3.00 (2 oz.)

This bar has tart cranberries and cherries, almond butter, and raw oats. It has a very fruity flavor, and it's dense, chewy, and a bit sticky.

CALORIES **200**
SATURATED FAT **0 g**
CARBS **39 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **10 g**
PROTEIN **4 g**
SODIUM **0 mg**

NUTRITION ! TASTE ^

Kate's Real Food Oatmeal Cranberry & Almond
$3.00 (2.2 oz.)

It's a very dense bar with chewy oats and crispy rice puffs. It's also sweet with tart cranberry flavor and heavy on the cinnamon.

CALORIES **260**
SATURATED FAT **1 g**
CARBS **36 g** | FIBER **4 g**
ADDED SUGARS **14 g**
PROTEIN **8 g**
SODIUM **130 mg**

NUTRITION ! TASTE ^

[1] Contains processed protein or fiber. [2] Sold only in multipacks.

WORSE — BETTER

CR RECOMMENDED

CAN YOU TRUST WHAT THE WRAPPER SAYS?

Energy bar labels are plastered with health claims. Which ones to believe? We break it down.

No Sugar Half of the bars in our tests have labels that say what they *don't* have in them. Examples include: no sugar and no artificial sweeteners, additives, or flavors. A look at the ingredients list will show that the claims are accurate, but that doesn't always mean the bar is good for you. For example, Barebells Protein Bar Chocolate Dough states "no added sugar" on the label. But it contains processed proteins, sucralose, and maltitol, a sugar alcohol that can cause digestive upset.

Made With Plant Protein You've probably heard about the benefits of plant-based protein, like the kind in nuts, soy beans, and peas. But in some bars, it's in the form of processed powders, not whole foods.

Lots of Whole Grains Several of the bars in our tests supplied at least 16 grams, or one serving, of whole grains. The daily recommendation, though, is at least three servings, or 48 grams.

Organic The Department of Agriculture has a strict definition of this term. Organic means that the ingredients in the food were grown without synthetic fertilizers or pesticides and are not genetically modified. In addition, most of the synthetic processing aids and artificial ingredients that are allowed in conventional foods are prohibited in organic ones.

Dave's Killer Bread Oat-Rageous Honey Almond [1]
$1.50 (1.75 oz.)

This slightly crumbly bar tastes mostly of grains (oats and whole wheat) with nuttiness from the chopped almonds.

CALORIES **210**
SATURATED FAT **2 g**
CARBS **31 g** | FIBER **5 g**
ADDED SUGARS **9 g**
PROTEIN **4 g**
SODIUM **125 mg**

NUTRITION TASTE

Nature Valley Soft-Baked Oatmeal Squares Cinnamon Brown Sugar [1][2]
$0.85 (1.24 oz.)

True to the name, it tastes of oats and cinnamon with a hint of brown sugar. The texture is more cookielike than a typical energy bar.

CALORIES **150**
SATURATED FAT **1 g**
CARBS **24 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **8 g**
PROTEIN **2 g**
SODIUM **120 mg**

NUTRITION TASTE

Bobo's Oat Bar Original
$3.25 (3 oz.)

This large bar is very thick and dense. It's sweet and has an oaty and mildly coconut-y flavor but is kind of bland, and it tastes a little underbaked.

CALORIES **340**
SATURATED FAT **8 g**
CARBS **62 g** | FIBER **4 g**
ADDED SUGARS **18 g**
PROTEIN **6 g**
SODIUM **150 mg**

NUTRITION TASTE

PROTEIN BARS

As you might guess, these bars tend to be packed with protein. Those with the most (as much as 20 grams) usually get their protein from processed sources.

88 Acres Pumpkin Seed Protein Bar Dark Chocolate Brownie
$2.95 (1.9 oz.)

Firm and dense, it has a tasty mix of sweet and salty flavors and lots of chewy pumpkin seeds. Chocolate and maple syrup give it richness.

CALORIES **280**
SATURATED FAT **4.5 g**
CARBS **15 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **5 g**
PROTEIN **12 g**
SODIUM **135 mg**

NUTRITION TASTE

RxBar Chocolate Sea Salt
$2.50 (1.8 oz.)

This moderately sweet bar is chewy, dense, and slightly sticky. It's chocolatey with a fruity flavor from dates and has hints of salt.

CALORIES **200**
SATURATED FAT **2 g**
CARBS **23 g** | FIBER **5 g**
ADDED SUGARS **0 g**
PROTEIN **12 g**
SODIUM **190 mg**

NUTRITION TASTE

PHOTOS: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS (10)

ILLUSTRATION BY TIM BOELAARS

people easily get that in their regular diet. Plus, even lower-protein bars may contain a considerable amount. For instance, most of the whole-food-based protein bars in our tests had 9 to 12 grams of protein—that's 17 to 22 percent of the daily protein needs of a 150-pound person.

▶ **PROCESSED FIBER.** Most Americans don't get the recommended 28 grams of fiber each day. But it's better to get your fiber from whole grains, nuts, and fruits than processed fibers like chicory root or inulin (a plant extract) found in some energy bars. These don't provide the same benefits as the fiber in foods, because they don't contain other vitamins and minerals, says Keating. Plus, if you're not accustomed to large amounts of fiber, eating a fiber-rich bar—such as the 11 grams in Bobo's Double Chocolate Almond Butter Protein Bar, which contains processed tapioca and chicory root fibers—may cause bloating and stomachaches.

The Best Bar for You

With nutritious ingredients that provide long-lasting fuel, the best energy bars can be a regular part of any healthy eating plan. They're easily portable, and many are delicious. Here are a few things to check for when you want a bar for a specific reason—and some picks from our tests:

▶ **MEAL REPLACEMENT.** A bar can be a good option in a pinch, especially if you pair it with a yogurt or piece of fruit. To stave off hunger, look for one with around 200 to 400 calories, 10 grams of protein, 5 grams of fiber, and 5 grams of fat. The RxBar we tested (Chocolate Sea Salt) fits the bill.

▶ **AN EASY PICK-ME-UP.** For a tasty, filling snack without as many calories as a full meal, choose a bar that has roughly 100 to 200 calories, 5 grams of protein, and 4 grams of fiber, suggests Allen, such as Jonesbar PB and J.

▶ **FUEL FOR A LONG WALK OR BIKE RIDE.** A 150- to 200-calorie bar with carbs and protein can give you the energy you need, says Bonci. If you sometimes have stomach issues during exercise, opt for one with less fiber (about 2 grams per bar), like Kind Healthy Grains Oats & Honey with Toasted Coconut.

PROTEIN BARS *continued*

Kind Protein Bar Dark Chocolate Nut[1]
$2.50 (1.76 oz.)

This has a crunchy texture, but it's also slightly gritty. It's pleasantly sweet, salty, and chocolatey with hints of honey and a toasty flavor.

CALORIES **240**
SATURATED FAT **4 g**
CARBS **18 g** | FIBER **5 g**
ADDED SUGARS **6 g**
PROTEIN **12 g**
SODIUM **125 mg**

NUTRITION TASTE

Dave's Killer Bread Amped-Up Organic Protein Bar Peanut Butter Chocolate Chunk[1]
$2.00 (1.9 oz.)

Dave's tastes like a dense oatmeal-chocolate chip cookie, but less sweet. It has peanut and seed flavors and a slight bitterness.

CALORIES **240**
SATURATED FAT **3.5 g**
CARBS **24 g** | FIBER **4 g**
ADDED SUGARS **9 g**
PROTEIN **10 g**
SODIUM **180 mg**

NUTRITION TASTE

GoMacro MacroBar Protein Decadence Dark Chocolate + Almonds[1]
$3.00 (2.3 oz.)

"Decadent" might be a bit strong, but the chocolate in this dense, chewy bar tastes rich. You also get a slight nuttiness from the almonds and sunflower seeds.

CALORIES **270**
SATURATED FAT **1.5 g**
CARBS **37 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **13 g**
PROTEIN **10 g**
SODIUM **35 mg**

NUTRITION TASTE

Luna Nutz Over Chocolate[1]
$1.60 (1.69 oz.)

There's a big toasted peanut flavor in this chewy, slightly crunchy bar. You get a hint of milk chocolate, too. Our testers noted a very slight grittiness.

CALORIES **210**
SATURATED FAT **3 g**
CARBS **24 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **6 g**
PROTEIN **9 g**
SODIUM **160 mg**

NUTRITION TASTE

Nature Valley Protein Chewy Bar Peanut, Almond & Dark Chocolate[1,2]
$1.10 (1.42 oz.)

Almonds, peanuts, and sunflower seeds give it a nice crunch. It's moderately sweet with some saltiness and hints of honey.

CALORIES **200**
SATURATED FAT **4 g**
CARBS **15 g** | FIBER **5 g**
ADDED SUGARS **5 g**
PROTEIN **10 g**
SODIUM **150 mg**

NUTRITION TASTE

Aloha Organic Protein Bar Chocolate Fudge Brownie[1]
$2.90 (1.98 oz.)

This slightly sweet bar has big chocolate flavor and just a hint of nuttiness. The texture is chewy and slightly chalky.

CALORIES **220**
SATURATED FAT **3 g**
CARBS **26 g** | FIBER **10 g**
ADDED SUGARS **4 g**
PROTEIN **14 g**
SODIUM **0 mg**

NUTRITION TASTE

PHOTOS: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS (12)

WORSE BETTER

WHICH ONE IS BETTER?

It's easy to confuse a nutritious energy bar with one that has less-than-stellar stats. Take, for example, these chocolate protein bars. Looking at the front of the wrapper, they seem similar. But turn them over and you'll discover that one is far better for you than the other.

THE HEALTHIER CHOICE

RXBAR CHOCOLATE SEA SALT

It has 200 calories, more than twice as many as the Protein One bar at right, but it's larger and more substantial. The RxBar also has more protein (12 grams)—and it comes from real foods, such as egg whites and nuts. Plus, it has just as much fiber (5 grams), also from unprocessed ingredients: nuts and dates. Those dates also provide sweetness, so there's no need for added sweeteners. Our testers gave it a higher taste score than the Protein One bar (see details on page 57).

PROTEIN ONE CHOCOLATE FUDGE BAR

With just 90 calories, the Protein One bar may look like the better pick. But it's half the size of the RxBar, so it may not be as satisfying. The Protein One has similar protein (10 grams) and fiber (5 grams) counts, but they come from processed sources, such as soy protein isolate and chicory root fiber. It's sweetened with stevia and erythritol (a sugar alcohol). These may sound "natural," but there is little evidence that they're any better for you than other sugar substitutes.

Bobo's Double Protein Bar Chocolate Almond Butter[1]
$3.00 (2.2 oz.)

Bobo's fudgy bar is soft and chewy. But our tasters noted some grittiness and a slightly artificial taste, probably from the pea and soy proteins it contains.

CALORIES **230**
SATURATED FAT **2.5 g**
CARBS **26 g** | FIBER **11 g**
ADDED SUGARS **6 g**
PROTEIN **14 g**
SODIUM **170 mg**

NUTRITION: ! TASTE: !

Barebells Protein Bar Chocolate Dough[1]
$2.70 (1.94 oz.)

It looks like a candy bar and is overly sweet with a hint of dried milk flavor. It's soft and chewy with crispy rice bits that add some texture.

CALORIES **200**
SATURATED FAT **3.5 g**
CARBS **20 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **0 g**
PROTEIN **20 g**
SODIUM **150 mg**

NUTRITION: ✓ TASTE: !

Clif Bar Chocolate Brownie[1]
$2.20 (2.4 oz.)

You get a bold dark cocoa flavor, but it's not enough to mask the beany soy crisps. The texture is dense, crumbly, and somewhat gritty.

CALORIES **250**
SATURATED FAT **1.5 g**
CARBS **43 g** | FIBER **5 g**
ADDED SUGARS **16 g**
PROTEIN **10 g**
SODIUM **180 mg**

NUTRITION: ✓ TASTE: !

Clif Builders Protein Bar Chocolate[1]
$2.00 (2.4 oz.)

The flavor of the chocolate in this bar is just so-so. It has a slight peanut and bean taste and a very firm texture.

CALORIES **280**
SATURATED FAT **6 g**
CARBS **31 g** | FIBER **3 g**
ADDED SUGARS **17 g**
PROTEIN **20 g**
SODIUM **210 mg**

NUTRITION: ✓ TASTE: !

Protein One Protein Bar Chocolate Fudge[1][2]
$1.20 (0.96 oz.)

It's slightly sweet with little chocolate flavor. It's also tough and chewy with some bitterness.

CALORIES **90**
SATURATED FAT **1.5 g**
CARBS **11 g** | FIBER **5 g**
ADDED SUGARS **0 g**
PROTEIN **10 g**
SODIUM **135 mg**

NUTRITION: ✓ TASTE: ✓

Think High Protein Bar Chocolate Fudge[1]
$2.40 (2.1 oz.)

This slightly crumbly nougat bar is bland (it's hard to taste the chocolate), and it has a slightly bitter aftertaste.

CALORIES **230**
SATURATED FAT **3 g**
CARBS **24 g** | FIBER **1 g**
ADDED SUGARS **0 g**
PROTEIN **20 g**
SODIUM **190 mg**

NUTRITION: ✓ TASTE: ✓

PHOTOGRAPH BY GREGORY REID; PROP STYLING BY MEGUMI EMOTO (TOP RIGHT)

[1] Contains processed protein or fiber. [2] Sold only in multipacks.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU BUY A DUD

Your new fridge, dryer, dishwasher (or fill in the blank) isn't working right. Should you get it repaired or ask for a refund? And how can you get customer service to actually help? Solutions ahead.

by Janet Siroto Illustrations by Federico Gastaldi

THE KNOCKING BEGAN quietly at first, deep inside Delane Fisher's new refrigerator. After a month of it getting louder, she realized that the return period at Home Depot, where she bought the fridge in late 2023, had come and gone. So she called the manufacturer, which sent out a repair technician. Two hours after he left, the knocking returned. Five months and multiple repair visits later, Fisher's bad-news fridge was still on the fritz, freezing food in the refrigerated section as well as making noise. She asked for a replacement. No dice.

One more round with the manufacturer's repair service did make Fisher's refrigerator usable—for now at least. But exhausted by the merry-go-round of repairs and run-around with customer service, Fisher, who lives in Nashville, Tenn., begrudgingly bought an extended warranty for $11.79 per month, hoping it would protect her if future malfunctions occurred.

Her frustration level? Through the roof. "It's just a shame to pay so much for appliances that are made so cheaply and don't last," she said.

Buying a lemon-level appliance isn't that unusual. According to recent CR surveys of our members, about a quarter to a half of major appliances like ranges, washers, dryers, and refrigerators develop problems at some point, with 6 to 14 percent happening in the first year of use. And getting retailers and manufacturers to repair or replace these household workhorses, whether they're under warranty or not, can require serious wrangling and a high tolerance for exasperation. That's especially true in these days of automated chatbots and when companies bury their customer service phone numbers deep on their websites, if they list them at all.

That's why we've come up with this guide to getting some action if you've bought a dud—and making sure you don't get stuck with another one the next time around.

GOT A DUD? START HERE.

When a new appliance acts up (or doesn't work at all), take these steps.

KEEP A PAPER TRAIL

As soon as you suspect there's a problem with a product, start documenting it. Snap a photo of your new microwave's melted plug, for example, or of that dishwasher tub filled with dirty water that won't drain. Or take a video, with sound, of your washing machine or dryer making scary noises. Then keep a written record of everyone you contacted, when, and what they agreed to do to remedy the situation.

ACT FAST

You can usually return a product to the store or website where you bought it within 15 to 30 days after you receive it. If you purchased the item on Amazon, for instance, you can usually send it back for a full refund within 30 days of buying it.

But some retailers require notification within 48 hours of delivery. That's the policy at Lowe's, for example, for major appliances like refrigerators and washing machines.

So check the return policy. It will usually be listed right on the receipt, whether paper or digital.

START WITH THE RETAILER, NOT THE MANUFACTURER

That's because the store where you bought the item is more likely to give you a refund or a replacement, sometimes with few, if any, questions asked, "while the manufacturer is more likely to offer a repair under the written warranty," says Edgar Dworsky, founder of Consumer World, a consumer education website.

And, he says, "once you let them start making repairs, you've basically paid full price for a reconditioned appliance."

Even if you've missed the retailer's official return window, it's worth starting with the store, says Amy Schmitz, a consumer law expert and professor at the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law in Columbus. Retailers might help "because they want to build goodwill and they care about their reputation," she says.

KNOW WHAT THE WARRANTY COVERS

Track down the product's warranty in your records or, if you don't have it, from the company's website. (Don't worry if you didn't return the card; it's mostly for recalls and marketing.)

The warranty may say that you must let the manufacturer try to fix the appliance before you qualify for a replacement or refund, but Schmitz says you can try to bypass the repair process. And the better you've documented your case, the more likely the manufacturer will let you skip a repair and just replace it.

Also check the warranty for other details. What parts are covered and for how long? Can the warranty be invalidated if you let a local person fix the item instead of someone from the retailer or manufacturer? Knowing what your warranty covers will make you better prepared when making your case.

If your appliance's problem starts after the product's official warranty expires, don't lose hope. Most states require manufacturers to honor so-called implied warranties, which means that products should be expected to function for a reasonable period of time regardless of the manufacturer's warranty. So cite this when you contact the manufacturer.

Another option: If you paid by credit card, see if the card issuer offers extended warranty coverage on appliances. Some American Express and Chase cards do.

TRY TO REACH A REAL PERSON AT CUSTOMER SERVICE

You're more likely to get a satisfactory solution—whether from a retailer or manufacturer—by communicating directly with a real person instead of emailing back and forth with someone or, even worse, engaging with an automated chatbot. If you purchased the item from a local store, going there to make your case may be your best bet for a resolution.

Calling is another good option. But sometimes just finding the phone number for a retailer or manufacturer can be tricky. If you can't find the toll-free number on the website or your receipt, search a database maintained by Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit consumer organization, for contact information for executives responsible for customer service at some major companies, including appliance manufacturers. The website is at elliott.org/company-contacts.

Wait times when calling customer service tend to be shorter on weekday mornings—especially Wednesdays and Thursdays—according to Talkdesk, a company that helps manage customer support for businesses.

If the problem occurs over the weekend or at night, when customer service may be closed, track down an email address for it and ask for a call back ASAP. That will help get you on its radar—and add to your paper trail. During your conversation, try to get

the representative's name and ask for email confirmation of what was said and whatever solution you reached.

Also, no matter how upset you are, dial down the rage. If you're not getting anywhere, calmly ask to speak with a supervisor, store manager, or senior marketing manager.

IF YOU HIT A DEAD END

Here are some options to try if you can't get satisfaction from either the retailer or manufacturer:

➜ **Dispute the charge with your credit card company.** The card issuer can remove the charge while it investigates. You usually have 60 days after a purchase to initiate a claim. Provide all of your documentation of the problem and attempts to solve it.

➜ **Complain on social media.** Post your complaint on the Facebook page of the retailer or brand, or use its handle on Instagram or X. Politely state your problem and request help. And post something on the company's website. Companies do look at what's there, and the last thing they want is negative reviews online, says Schmitz at Ohio State University.

➜ **Get help.** Contact the Better Business Bureau or your state attorney general's office to escalate a complaint with a retailer or manufacturer. (Check your state's web page for "consumer protection" or "consumer services.")

➜ **Enlist a consumer reporter at a local newspaper or TV news station.** Do an online search for those in your area. One might cover your situation and get results.

➜ **Head to small-claims court.** It can resolve cases (sometimes up to $25,000) and you typically don't need a lawyer to file.

3 Sticky Situations and How to Handle Them

PROBLEM #1

Your 14-month-old fridge isn't keeping food cold and your one-year manufacturer's warranty no longer covers it.

SOLUTION: Bring up the implied warranty. The Uniform Commercial Code, which is recognized in most states, offers protection to some degree. It states that a purchase should function as expected for a reasonable length of time. Even after the product's original warranty expires (or if it didn't come with one), you have rights to a remedy under the UCC. If you need more guidance on this, contact the Better Business Bureau or your state's Department of Consumer Affairs.

PROBLEM #2

Your new espresso maker stopped working, no one answers the company's phone, and no email address is listed.

SOLUTION: Try Elliott Advocacy (see the facing page) or GetHuman (gethuman.com), searching by the company's name. Then look for "customer care," "customer relations," "manager," or "director." Last ditch: Post a complaint on the brand's social media and say you need a response within a week or two or you'll escalate the issue to your state's attorney general or another agency.

PROBLEM #3

You requested a credit card chargeback for your faulty new dishwasher six weeks ago but worry that it won't go through.

SOLUTION: You can file for a chargeback only if you first tried to resolve the problem with the seller. To make your case, find your receipt, the return policy, the warranty, and records of when and how you alerted the seller and manufacturer about the problem, including visual proof. Then contact the credit card issuer to find out how to share that info. It must acknowledge your request within 30 days and resolve the problem within 90.

FOR YOUR NEXT BIG PURCHASE, TRY THIS

These steps can help you avoid buying a lemon—or make the resolution process easier if you do.

➜ **Seek out reliable companies.** You want to buy major appliances from retailers and brands known for reliability and great customer service. Check out our ratings of appliance retailers on the facing page. Also see what the Better Business Bureau has to say. And read the positive and negative reviews, and look for patterns on retailer or manufacturer websites. Did one person report that the water-line to the icemaker froze—or 10? Read reviews of retailers' customer service—social media can help here—in advance, too.

➜ **Shop locally.** When possible, buy from independent retailers instead of chain stores. They appear near the top of CR's ratings, especially in terms of service. Local dealers can sometimes match big-box prices and may offer in-house service and loaners if your appliance isn't working right.

➜ **Read the warranty and return policy before you buy.** Many warranties cover the entire appliance for the first year and then only certain parts after that. Washers, for instance, may come with a 10-year warranty, but the fine print may say that applies only to the motor, while the whole appliance is covered for only one year. So if the control panel stops working, you're out of luck. State laws may require retailers to post their return policies, and not doing so can have consequences. In California and New York, for example, if terms aren't properly displayed, the retailer must provide a full refund within 30 days.

Also, see how returns work. A policy might say you can send an appliance back to the manufacturer but at your expense, says Ruth Susswein, director of consumer protection at Consumer Action, a nonprofit. That's not a small amount if you're shipping back a dishwasher.

➜ **Always buy with a credit card.** You may be offered a slightly better deal if you're willing to pay by check or in cash—but don't do it. If you're in a dispute with a company over a lemon it sold you, your credit card company may remove the charge as it tries to resolve the problem for you.

➜ **Try the product right away.** Use the convection feature on your new oven or turn on the dryer right after it arrives. You might even ask the delivery person or installer to wait while you do a quick check. Susswein did that with a washer and wasn't happy with the way the water trickled into the tub, so she had the installers take it back. If workers are in a rush, you might offer a (bigger) tip to stay for this.

➜ **Keep the receipts and packaging.** Get organized with a system for saving your print receipts in your home filing cabinet and emailed or digital receipts on your home computer. Keep all paperwork for big purchases in a folder or binder. Create a section for each major appliance and label it with the description and date you bought it. You can take photos of warranties, too.

Also, hang on to the packaging for at least 30 days. Many retailers and manufacturers won't take a product back for a return without it, and it can have an important UPC code on it. Photograph the carton if you think there was any damage in transit (in which case you can refuse delivery). This can be vital evidence if you need to send it back.

Retailer Name	Overall Satisfaction Score	Price paid	Selection	Service	In-store atmosphere	Website usability	Home delivery	Installation
MAJOR APPLIANCES								
Abt	91	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲
RC Willey Home Furnishings	84	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	–	▲▲	▲▲
Independents	81	●	●	▲▲	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲
Nebraska Furniture Mart	79	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲▲
Costco	78	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲
Orville's Home Appliances	76	●	▲	▲	▲▲	–	▲▲	▲
Spencer's TV & Appliance	75	▲	▲	▲	▲	–	▲	▲
Warners' Stellian	74	●	▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲
Bray & Scarff	73	▼	●	▲▲	▲▲	–	▲	▲
Ferguson	73	●	▲	▲	▲▲	–	▲	–
Famous Tate	69	●	▲	▲	▲▲	–	▲	▲
Grand Appliance & TV	67	●	▲	●	▲	–	▲▲	▲
Amazon.com	64	●	●	▲	–	▲	▲	–
P.C. Richard & Son	63	●	●	●	●	●	▲	▲
Trail Appliances	62	▼	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲
Best Buy	61	●	●	●	▲	●	▲	▲
Manufacturers' websites	61	●	●	●	–	●	▲	▲
Exchange	58	●	●	●	–	●	▲	●
Canadian Appliance Source (CAS)	53	●	●	●	●	●	▲	●
Home Depot	53	●	●	●	●	●	▲	●
Lowe's	53	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Retailer Name	Overall Satisfaction Score	Price paid	Selection	Service	In-store atmosphere	Website usability	Home delivery	Installation
MAJOR APPLIANCES *Continued*								
Sears	47	●	▼▼	●	▼	–	●	–
Menards	43	●	▼▼	●	●	–	–	–
SMALL APPLIANCES								
Abt	77	●	▲▲	▲▲	–	▲▲	–	–
Amazon.com	70	●	▲▲	●	–	▲	▲▲	–
Costco	68	▲	▼▼	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	–
Williams Sonoma	66	▼	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	–
QVC.com	63	●	●	▲	–	▲	▲	–
Kohl's	62	▲	●	●	●	▲	▲	–
Manufacturers' websites	62	●	▲	▲	–	▲	▲	–
Macy's	61	●	●	●	●	●	▲	–
Independents	59	●	●	▲	▲	●	▲	–
Sam's Club	57	▲	▼▼	●	●	●	▲	–
Best Buy	54	●	●	●	●	●	▲	–
Target	52	●	●	▼	●	●	▲	–
BJ's	48	▲	▼▼	▼	●	–	–	–
Bed Bath & Beyond	45	●	●	▼	–	●	–	–
Home Depot	45	▼	▼	▼	●	●	●	–
Walmart	45	●	▼	▼▼	▼▼	●	▲	–
Lowe's	41	▼	▼	▼	●	●	●	–
Canadian Tire	39	●	●	▼	●	●	–	–
Menards	37	▼	▼	▼	●	–	–	–

HOW WE SURVEY: The ratings are based on responses from CR members in our 2024 surveys: 9,721 CR members reported on 12,970 purchases at major-appliance retailers, and 13,147 members reported on 16,619 purchases at small-appliance retailers.

Overall Satisfaction Score is based on price, selection, service, and other factors. A gray dash (–) indicates that there was an insufficient sample size to provide a rating or that the attribute wasn't applicable to a retailer. **Scores** are averaged on a scale from very poor to excellent.

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WORSE — BETTER

Your Healthy Teeth Toolkit

Everything you need to avoid trouble—plus the real deal on water flossers, whitening strips, and more.

by Catherine Roberts
Photograph by Gregory Reid

With age comes a greater risk that things will go wrong with your teeth. Among adults, procedures such as filling cavities tend to peak in your early to mid-50s, according to the Health Policy Institute. By the time you reach your 60s, you're almost certain to need treatment for tooth decay. Figuring out exactly what dental care you need and when can be challenging. Yet there's one key step that's both simple and inexpensive: taking care of your teeth at home.

The great news is that these days, people are more likely to retain their teeth for more years than they used to. But if you do lose a tooth, you're more likely than ever to have a dental implant put into place, which requires careful upkeep and sometimes needs to be replaced. Plus, medications for chronic conditions like depression and high blood pressure can raise your risk of experiencing dry mouth–which in turn raises your risk of tooth decay.

Though certain dental problems may require extra attention, the basics of

brushing twice daily and cleaning between your teeth haven't changed. And while plenty of companies would like to sell you pricey gadgets and special products for your oral health, you don't need to shell out big bucks to keep your mouth in great shape.

How Often Do You Really Need a Dental Cleaning?

Even with great home hygiene habits, you need to continue seeing your dentist for regular checkups and cleanings. Some people will need to visit more often than the standard twice a year, while others may be fine with less frequent visits. A 2020 review by Cochrane, an independent group of expert researchers, found that adults who visited the dentist every six months and those who visited on a schedule customized to their individual dental risk had comparable oral health.

People who are being treated for periodontal disease or who have dental implants—which can fail more quickly than a natural tooth—may need to see their provider every three months or so, says Martha McComas, a clinical associate professor of dentistry at the University of Michigan School of Dentistry in Ann Arbor.

Your dentist can help you figure out the right cadence for checkups, as well as your optimal at-home dental care strategy. "We can customize it based on what we see in your mouth," says Karin Arsenault, DMD, program director of geriatric dentistry at the Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston.

In between visits, here's what you need to know about the vital tools for keeping your teeth and your whole mouth as healthy as they can be.

Your Toothpaste Matters

Fluoride is important

Fluoride is crucial because of the power it has to help fight cavities and tooth decay—something proved by decades of research. While some ingredients, notably a chemical called hydroxyapatite, have shown promise as viable alternatives, fluoride is still your best choice right now, according to the American Dental Association.

Cavities occur when the bacteria in our mouths consume the traces of food left on our teeth, particularly anything sugary. As the bacteria gobble up these sugars, they release acid, which can remove minerals from our teeth's enamel, eventually creating cavities. Fluoride can help replace some of these lost minerals, strengthening the surface of our teeth and repairing some damage.

When you're shopping for toothpaste, you may want to look for one with the ADA Seal of Acceptance. To earn that seal, manufacturers need to not only include fluoride in their toothpaste but also meet other safety and efficacy standards, including one meant to ensure toothpastes aren't too abrasive. (Very abrasive toothpastes can damage enamel.)

Watch out for this ingredient

If you're prone to canker sores inside your mouth, you may want to look for a toothpaste that doesn't contain sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS). A 2019 research review found that using an SLS-free toothpaste might help reduce canker sores in people who get a lot of them (about 25 percent of adults).

Skip charcoal toothpaste

Activated charcoal is often touted as a superior ingredient for a variety of products, including toothpaste. But it can be highly abrasive, which can damage your enamel and cause increased sensitivity.

How much to use

Generally, adults need only a pea-sized amount of toothpaste—that will create enough foam to cover all the surfaces in your mouth, Arsenault says.

Also, "one of the big myths about toothbrushing is that you should rinse your mouth out after you brush," says McComas. But studies show that the fluoride in your toothpaste provides the biggest benefit if you don't do this, instead allowing the fluoride to work its magic on your enamel for more time.

What about prescription pastes?

You may want to ask your dentist whether a prescription toothpaste, which generally contains a higher dose of fluoride, might be right for you. Severe dry mouth, which can be more common as you age (particularly if you're taking certain medications for various chronic conditions), can raise your risk of cavities. So can periodontal disease, especially if the surfaces of the roots of your teeth, which lack protective enamel, are exposed.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: PROP STYLING BY MEGUMI EMOTO

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GUILHERME HENRIQUE

DECODING THE TOOTHPASTE LABEL

The toothpaste aisle can be a confusing place, with a huge variety of claims touted on product labels. Companies tend to emphasize one possible benefit of a toothpaste, but that doesn't mean that's the only thing a given product can help with, says Roxanne Dsouza-Norwood, a registered dental hygienist and clinical assistant professor of dental hygiene at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "The same ingredient can do multiple things. Fluoride is an amazing example of that," she says. You may see two separate toothpastes, one marketed for sensitivity and another for periodontitis, for instance. But don't think you need one of each: The two products might have the exact same active ingredient listed on the packaging. Here are a few common label claims and the ingredients meant to achieve those effects.

Cavity protection

This is the most basic function of toothpaste, and it's the main reason you'll see fluoride in your toothpaste. It comes in a few different forms, such as stannous fluoride and sodium fluoride. Other ingredients like hydroxyapatite and various kinds of calcium and phosphates may help enhance the action of fluoride, but the University of Michigan's Martha McComas warns there's not enough evidence to recommend them on their own without fluoride, too.

Gum health or antigingivitis

Stannous fluoride could also be the active ingredient at work here, because it has antimicrobial properties. Some other ingredients in toothpaste may also be aimed at reducing gingivitis, including some zinc compounds and even essential oils such as eucalyptol (made from eucalyptus) or menthol.

Whitening

The abrasive ingredients in toothpaste, such as sodium bicarbonate (more commonly known as baking soda) or sodium citrate, are often touted as whiteners. Hydrogen peroxide can also be used to help fight stains. McComas says that while any toothpaste can help you limit stains from coffee, wine, tea, and the like, the power of whitening toothpaste is limited, because it's on your teeth for only a few minutes. Whitening strips, on the other hand, tend to require at least 15 or 30 minutes of contact with your teeth.

Tartar control

Tartar is the hard yellowish substance that forms when plaque is allowed to remain on your teeth and solidify, and only a professional dental cleaning can remove it. But some ingredients, like tetrasodium pyrophosphate (and other pyrophosphates), are thought to help prevent tartar from forming.

Sensitivity reduction

Stannous fluoride can help reduce tooth sensitivity. A 2020 analysis in the Journal of Dental Research found that the effectiveness of stannous fluoride for this purpose can be enhanced when it's combined with potassium. Also good for reducing sensitivity: calcium sodium phosphosilicate.

How to Brush Well

The right bristles

Use a toothbrush with soft or extra-soft bristles. There are so many toothbrush options, but in the midst of considering the shape of the brush head, the brand name, and other fancy features, don't lose sight of bristle stiffness. Seek out a toothbrush with "soft" or "extra soft" on the packaging.

The wrong bristles

Avoid brushes with bristles labeled medium or hard stiffness. Medium- and hard-bristled brushes have no place anywhere near your mouth; save them for household cleaning. Stiffer bristles are more likely to damage your gums or your teeth's enamel, according to the American Dental Association.

The advantages of electric

You can keep your mouth perfectly healthy with a manual toothbrush, but a 2014 Cochrane review found that three months of using an electric toothbrush resulted in 21 percent less plaque and 11 percent less gum inflammation (also called gingivitis).

Electric toothbrushes can have other benefits, too. They generally have larger handles, which can be helpful for people who have a hard time gripping or manipulating a manual toothbrush, says Roxanne Dsouza-Norwood, a registered dental hygienist and clinical assistant professor of dental hygiene at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

There are not significant performance differences between oscillating (or rotating) electric toothbrushes, which typically have round heads, and sonic toothbrushes, which usually have rectangular heads. So get the kind you like and will use. (Check out our six top picks, below.)

How often to brush

Do it twice a day for at least 2 minutes; an electric toothbrush with a built-in timer can help make sure you hit that target. Some research suggests that people may brush for a lot less time than this on average, possibly around a minute or less. But common sense and a 2009 Journal of Dental Hygiene study suggest that brushing longer will remove more plaque–though the added benefit of extra time beyond 2 minutes is probably marginal. Proper technique is crucial, too (see "Secrets to Better Cleaning–With an Electric Brush," on the facing page).

What if you have gum problems?

Keeping your teeth clean is a critical part of care if you have gum issues, but it's also possible to get overzealous with your brushing. And brushing too hard can exacerbate problems, including receding gums, which can expose the roots of your teeth to a greater risk of cavities and tooth decay.

Electric toothbrushes with a pressure sensor can be a handy way to make sure you don't brush too hard and damage your gums, says Sally Cram, DDS, a spokesperson for the American Dental Association.

6 Electric Toothbrushes We Love

Our tests evaluate electric toothbrushes for cleaning ability, battery life, and ease of use. To see how well each brush cleans, a trained technician measures plaque levels in volunteers before and after 2 minutes of brushing.

Oral-B iO Series 7 $198

86 OVERALL SCORE

This rotating toothbrush offers five brushing modes, a 2-minute timer, and a pressure sensor. It connects with an app that turns your brushing into a game.

Oral-B iO Series 10 $400

85 OVERALL SCORE

The charger for this rotating brush—the priciest one in our ratings—provides real-time feedback on the pressure you're using, your mouth coverage, and more.

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS, MANUFACTURERS

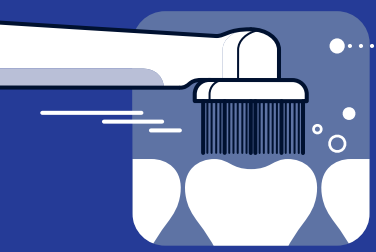
WORSE — BETTER

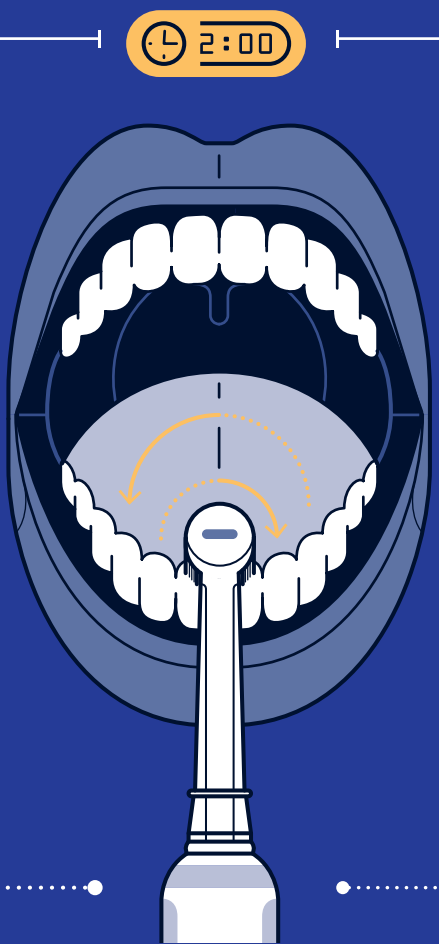
CR RECOMMENDED

SECRETS TO BETTER CLEANING—WITH AN ELECTRIC BRUSH

A common mistake people make with an electric toothbrush is using it the way they would a manual—making little brushing motions back and forth. But this can actually limit the amount of added benefit you get from the brush. Here's what to do instead.

BE THOROUGH. Make sure you clean each tooth for a few seconds on the front, back, and biting surface. Continue this until you reach 2 minutes of total brushing time.





ANGLE THE BRUSH. When brushing the front and back surfaces of your teeth, hold the brush against your teeth with the bristles positioned along the gumline, angled about 45 degrees from the surface.

BRUSH IN SMALL CIRCLES. Take a few passes over the same areas to make sure you don't miss any spots, in much the same way as you might overlap lines when mowing a lawn.

USE A LIGHT TOUCH. Gentle pressure is enough. Instead of scrubbing, slowly move the brush from tooth to tooth.

Philips Sonicare 4100 Series $44

80 OVERALL SCORE

This sonic toothbrush doesn't boast many extras, but it has a 2-minute timer and a pressure sensor. It got high marks in our tests for ease of use and cleaning ability.

Burst Pro Sonic $90

78 OVERALL SCORE

This sonic toothbrush offers solid cleaning at a lower price, and offers both a timer and a pressure sensor. It performed especially well in our test of battery life.

Oral-B iO Series 3 $59

74 OVERALL SCORE

A much simpler offering from Oral-B, this rotating brush still performed well in our cleaning test and is easy to use. It also comes with a timer and a pressure sensor.

Philips Sonicare 9900 Prestige $380

71 OVERALL SCORE

This sonic brush adapts the intensity of its movements to your brushing. In our tests, it cleaned well, though not as well as Philips' cheaper 4100 Series brush.

How to Floss

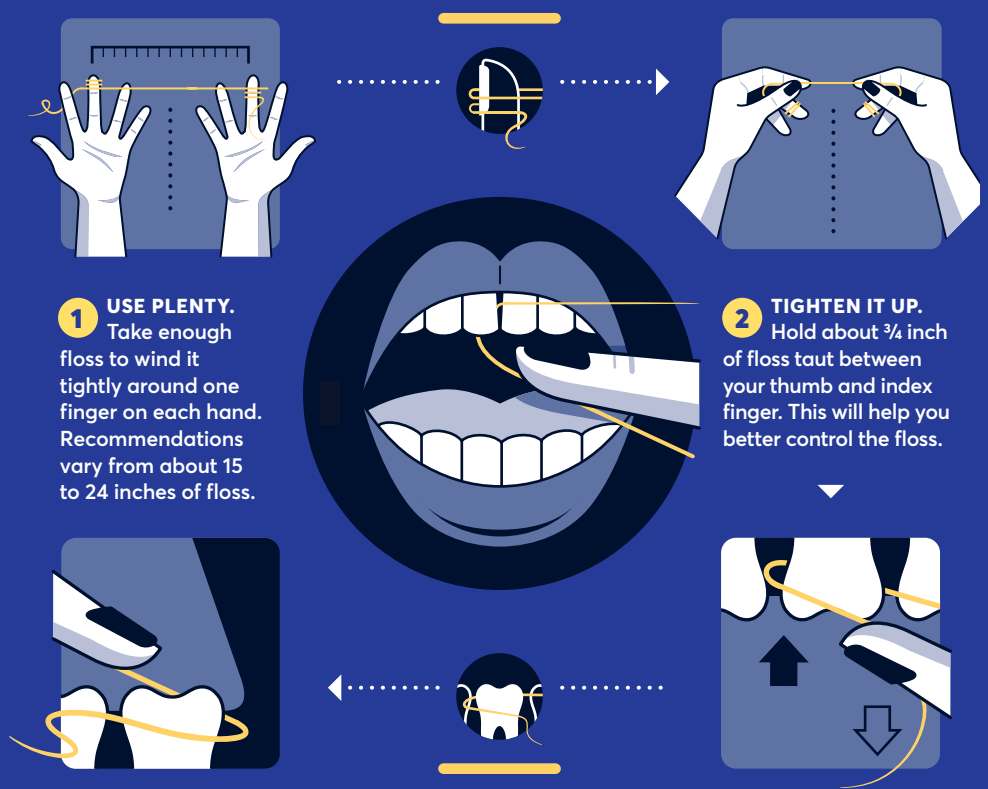
Why flossing matters

Use any standard string floss (waxed or unwaxed), floss pick, or interdental cleaning brush. The scientific evidence for flossing is not as strong as it is for brushing: A 2019 Cochrane review found that flossing in addition to brushing may reduce plaque and gingivitis more than brushing alone, but the authors cautioned that the evidence supporting this conclusion was weak. Still, dentists say the biological justification for flossing is sound: Without it, the bacteria that cause decay would build up between your teeth even if you're brushing regularly.

Do water flossers work?

While not quite as effective as string floss, water flossers can be a great option if you have a hard time using string floss, have mouth hardware like braces or a permanent retainer, or have other kinds of dental work like implants, bridges, or crowns. The ADA's Sally Cram says the evidence

GOOD FLOSSING TECHNIQUE



1 USE PLENTY. Take enough floss to wind it tightly around one finger on each hand. Recommendations vary from about 15 to 24 inches of floss.

2 TIGHTEN IT UP. Hold about ¾ inch of floss taut between your thumb and index finger. This will help you better control the floss.

3 BEND YOUR FLOSS. Curve the string into a C-shape around each tooth.

4 BE GENTLE. Ease it carefully down to the gumline before sliding it up, down, forward, and back.

5 DON'T SKIP A SPOT. Remember to floss both sides of every tooth, including your molars.

3 PFAS-Free Options

Some dental flosses are coated in PFAS (aka forever chemicals), which helps them slide easily between your teeth. But PFAS have also been linked to a number of health and environmental problems. Luckily, there are effective alternatives. CR partnered with Made Safe, an independent organization that certifies products as safer and more sustainable, to find flosses made without PFAS. Here are three good options, which are also made from silk instead of plastic.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Nudge Clean Sustainable Pure Silk Floss, Radius Natural Biodegradable Silk Floss, TreeBird Pure Silk Eco Floss

on the benefits of a water flosser is encouraging, but it's not enough for her to recommend it as a replacement for flossing just yet. Still, if you know you won't use string floss every day, a water flosser is much better than nothing.

Avoid floss with PFAS

Skip floss that's coated with these environmental contaminants, which are associated with a variety of health problems. You can look for flosses that use non-PFAS coatings such as beeswax or plant waxes like carnauba or candelilla. You may also want to consider flosses made from natural fibers like silk or cotton instead of plastic. (See "3 PFAS-Free Options," on the facing page.)

How often to floss

Do it once a day. Whether you floss or brush first doesn't matter, as long as you do both.

What if you have implants or gum disease?

If you have an implant, you may want to opt for an interdental brush instead of regular string floss, particularly if your implant doesn't touch the teeth next to it on either side.

These are tiny round brushes designed specifically to clean in between teeth, and they work well with teeth that have gaps in between them. They come in different sizes, so Jennifer Harmon, a registered dental hygienist and clinical associate professor at the University of North Carolina Adams School of Dentistry in Chapel Hill, recommends working with your dentist to figure out which size you need for your teeth.

If you're dealing with bleeding gums, Arsenault says you can consider using prescription chlorhexidine mouthwash after you floss. Just be sure to follow your dentist's instructions, because chlorhexidine can also cause some tooth staining and changes in taste.

PHOTO: GREGORY REID; PROP STYLING BY MEGUMI EMOTO (FLOSS)

Do You Need These Dental Tools?

TONGUE SCRAPERS

The experts we spoke with say this is a great tool. The bacteria that cause tooth decay don't just live on your teeth; they can collect on your tongue, too. That means you should clean your tongue daily. You can do this with your toothbrush bristles or the ridged back of some brushes, but a tongue scraper can be a little more effective, says Sally Cram, DDS. Plus, scraping your tongue is a great habit if you struggle with halitosis (bad breath), says Roxanne Dsouza-Norwood, a registered dental hygienist.

But be gentle; otherwise you could accidentally lacerate your tongue. And you may need to experiment with different types of tongue scrapers to find one that doesn't activate your gag reflex.

WHITENING STRIPS

Over-the-counter whitening strips can help your teeth look whiter, but it can sometimes be difficult to spot the change, says Martha McComas of the University of Michigan. You can try using them only on the upper teeth first so that the difference is more visible. (Then follow up by applying them to the lower teeth.) Keep in mind that the older you get, the more you can see the yellowish dentin underneath your enamel, which—along with crowns and implants—is not affected by strips. So you might end up with uneven colors.

Strips can also cause sensitivity, particularly if you already have sensitive areas from gum recession, Cram says. So leave them on only as long as instructed on the package.

MOUTHWASH

Because swishing it around can coat parts of your teeth's surface that are harder to reach with other tools, mouthwash can be a nice adjunct to your dental care routine, particularly if you choose one that has fluoride. Prescription washes that contain chlorhexidine can also be helpful for people with bleeding gums or other severe gum problems.

Mouthwash shouldn't be used, however, to replace more important dental hygiene steps like brushing and flossing. Plaque (especially older plaque) is extremely sticky, McComas says. "Just rinsing is not enough," she says. Also: Stay away from alcohol-based mouthwashes, because these can dry out your mouth, says Karin Arsenault, DMD.

CR's Ultimate Guide to Laundry

We've tested hundreds of washers, dryers, and detergents. Here are the best and worst.

BY KEITH FLAMER ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOMMY PARKER

SOONER OR LATER IT HAPPENS: The washer or dryer you've been depending on for years handles its last load. Or maybe you inherited a laundry set with your home that has never quite measured up.

If this sounds familiar, you might be ready to shop for something new. You'll find plenty of excellent options to choose from. The best of today's models deliver superb performance, save water and energy, and have many convenience features, including cycles you can customize to your own needs, WiFi capability that lets you keep tabs on the task at home or away, and more.

Also new in this guide: Our top-rated detergents, which get the toughest stains out even if you have hard water. (Salad dressing? Check! Chocolate? Check!) And several come in formulas that are gentle on your skin *and* the environment.

How to pick the best laundry gear? On the next 24 pages we have expert advice from CR's pros—plus hundreds of product ratings—to help you shop with confidence.

WASHING MACHINES	CLOTHES DRYERS	WASHER/DRYER PAIRS	ALL-IN-ONE WASHER/DRYERS	COMPACT WASHERS & DRYERS	LAUNDRY DETERGENTS
P. 76	P. 82	P. 88	P. 91	P. 92	P. 95

LG WM6700HBA
washer

LG DLEX6700B
dryer

$3,250 for the pair

83 OVERALL SCORE

Washing Machines

You might not love doing laundry, but you probably like having clean clothes, so picking the right washer is key. First, you'll need to decide on a type: front-load, top-load agitator, or top-load high-efficiency (HE). Each has pros and cons (read on to learn all about those). But no matter which kind you prefer, you'll find models with top cleaning scores and lots of helpful features in our ratings.

LG WM8900HBA
$1,375

87 OVERALL SCORE

EXPERT TIP

"If you don't want to wait for a long wash cycle and your clothes are only lightly soiled, try the quick or speed cycle, which can cut down wash time down by around 20 minutes."

MICHAEL SEDLAK
CR Laundry Test Engineer

FRONT-LOAD WASHERS

How to Shop

Looking for the best cleaning performance, energy savings, and room for large loads? Go with a front-loader. These washers tumble your items in and out of water in both a clockwise and counterclockwise motion to clean them, using about 10 gallons per load—about 50 percent less water than top-load agitator machines.

▶ **Don't worry—you don't have to sacrifice cleaning ability for water savings.** Front-load models outscore other washer types in our cleaning tests. They can be energy-misers, too. Energy Star certified front-loaders use about 45 percent less energy than top-load agitators, and their high-speed spin cycles extract more moisture from fabric, cutting drying time (and potentially saving about $370 over the washer's lifespan). Many of the models in our ratings get CR's Green Choice designation, indicated with a green leaf, which identifies the most eco-friendly products.

▶ **Front-loaders offer plenty of capacity for most households.** Large-capacity models (4.5 cubic feet and above) are great for bulky loads, so you won't have to drag your king-size comforter to a laundromat.

▶ **They also offer bells and whistles you might not see in top-load models.** For example, some front-loaders (like Samsung's FlexWash, $2,000) include a separate wash chamber that lets you do small loads more efficiently.

You'll also find digital dials, voice-activated controls, AI smart dispensers that sense load size and release the right amount of detergent or bleach at specific cycle times, pet-hair removal, and steam cycles. Other features to look for include sanitizing cycles to reduce allergens and bacteria, self-cleaning, and post-wash tumbling to keep finished loads fresh as they await transfer to the dryer.

▶ **A few downsides of front-loaders:** Wash cycles are long. The heavy-soil cycle we use in testing runs from 65 to 120 minutes. And the front-opening door means you have to bend to load and unload. More annoying, the machines are prone to developing mold. To avoid this, leave the door open when the washer isn't in use, and wipe the flexible door gasket, detergent dispenser, and door after the last use of the day. Some manufacturers have added features to reduce moisture and bacteria, such as GE's Ultra Fresh OdorBlock, found on all the GE washers in our ratings, including the GE PFW870SPVRS, $1,375. Finally, front-loaders generally cost more than top-loaders, ranging from $800 to $2,500.

What to Avoid

If you're shopping in person, check the washer's door seal and avoid models with a loose or weak one, which can promote mold. And measure your laundry space and doorways to be sure your new washer will fit.

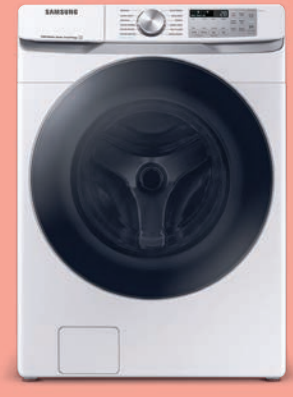
Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results						Features + Specs						
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Washing performance	Energy efficiency	Water efficiency	Gentleness	Noise	Vibration	Claimed capacity (cu. ft.)	Dimensions (in.)	Cycle time (min.)	Energy Star	Stackable	WiFi	Steam option
FRONT-LOAD WASHERS																	
LG WM8900HBA	87	$1,375	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	5.2	41x29x33	105	●	●	●	●
LG Signature WM9500HKA	86	$1,935	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	5.8	41x30x34	120	●		●	●
LG WM6500HWA	84	$1,340	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	➖	5.0	39x27x33	110	●	●	●	●
LG WM5500HWA	83	$1,200	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	➖	🔼	➖	4.5	39x27x31	110	●	●	●	●
LG WM6700HBA	82	$1,300	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔽	➖	➖	5.0	39x27x33	120	●	●	●	
LG WM3470CW	82	$1,035	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	➖	🔼	🔽	5.0	39x27x33	95	●	●		
Electrolux ELFW7637AT	81	$1,370	🔼	➖	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	➖	🔼	4.5	38x27x32	85	●	●		●
Electrolux ELFW7537AW	80	$1,175	🔼	➖	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	4.5	39x27x32	85	●	●		●
Samsung FlexWash WV60M9900AV	80	$2,000	🔼	➖	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	5.0	47x27x34	100	●		●	●
Maytag MHW6630HW	79	$1,045	➖	➖	⏫	🔼	⏫	➖	🔼	⏫	4.8	39x27x33	95	●	●		●
Samsung WF45B6300AW	79	$1,000	🔼	➖	⏫	⏫	⏫	➖	🔼	🔼	4.5	39x27x32	100	●	●	●	●
Maytag MHW5630HW	79	$950	➖	➖	⏫	🔼	⏫	➖	🔼	🔼	4.5	39x27x32	100	●	●		●
Maytag MHW8630HC	79	$1,425	➖	➖	⏫	🔼	⏫	➖	🔼	🔼	5.0	39x27x33	95	●	●	●	●

PHOTOS, PREVIOUS SPREAD AND THIS SPREAD: MANUFACTURERS

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results						Features + Specs						
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Washing performance	Energy efficiency	Water efficiency	Gentleness	Noise	Vibration	Claimed capacity (cu. ft.)	Dimensions (in.)	Cycle time (min.)	Energy Star	Stackable	WiFi	Steam option
FRONT-LOAD WASHERS *Continued*																	
Samsung WF45T6000AW	78	$820	▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	4.5	40x27x32	90	●	●		
Samsung WF51CG8000AW	77	$1,000	▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲	●	5.1	39x27x34	105	●	●	●	
GE PFW870SPVRS	77	$1,375	●	▼	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲	5.3	40x28x35	105	●	●	●	●
Samsung Bespoke WF53BB8700AT	77	$1,350	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	5.3	39x27x35	100	●	●	●	●
Samsung WF46BG6500AV	77	$1,300	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	●	4.6	39x27x31	95	●	●	●	●
Samsung WF50BG8300AE	77	$1,200	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	●	5.0	39x27x33	95	●	●	●	●
Speed Queen FF7010WN	76	$2,450	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	●	●	3.5	40x27x31	75				
Samsung BESPOKE WF53BB8900AT	76	$1,515	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	●	5.3	39x27x35	110	●	●	●	●
Amana NFW5800HW	76	$900	●	▼	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲	●	4.3	39x27x32	110	●	●		
GE Profile PFW950SPTDS	75	$1,400	●	▼	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	●	▲▲	5.3	40x28x35	95	●	●	●	●
Electrolux ELFW7437AW	75	$1,065	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	4.5	39x27x32	65	●	●		●
Whirlpool WFW9620HC	74	$1,700	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	5.0	39x27x34	100		●	●	●
Whirlpool WFW5605MW	74	$950	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	4.5	39x27x32	95	●	●		●
Whirlpool WFW862CHC	74	$1,565	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲	●	4.3	39x27x32	110		●		●
GE GFW655SSVWW	71	$1,200	●	▼	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲▲	5.0	40x28x33	110	●	●	●	●
Whirlpool WFW6605MC	70	$1,110	●	●	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	5.0	39x27x34	95	●	●		●
Midea MLH52S7AGS	68	$1,100	–	–	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▼	5.2	40x27x35	70	●	●		●

TOP PICKS

Front-Load Washers



EXCELLENT ENERGY-SAVER

Samsung WF45B6300AW
$1,000

79 OVERALL SCORE

Top cleaning scores and impressive efficiency make this an all-around winner.

MOLD-BUSTER

GE Profile PFW950SPTDS
$1,400

75 OVERALL SCORE

It uses airflow technology to reduce moisture and Microban antimicrobial odor control to fend off mold and odors.

PHOTOS, THIS SPREAD AND NEXT SPREAD: MANUFACTURERS

TOP-LOAD WASHERS

How to Shop

There are two types of top-load washers. Top-load agitator models—probably the most familiar style—have a center post that twists clothes back and forth. Top-load high efficiency (HE) washers have an open tub with a low-profile "impeller" at the bottom that jostles clothes clean. Both kinds typically cost less than front-load models and have cycle times that are 30 to 45 minutes shorter—but they don't clean heavily soiled items as well.

▶ **Top-load agitators are the least expensive option of all** ($450 to $1,560) **and the least effective cleaners.** The center post can be rough on clothes and it takes up space, leaving less room for big loads. To get around that, look for a "dual action" model that promotes turnover inside the drum while being gentler on clothes (the GE GTW585BSVWS, $850, for example). If you need to wash large loads, get one with a capacity of at least 4.5 cubic feet. Also, check for a high water-efficiency score in the ratings. Some models have high-tech features, such as remote control and diagnostics via a smartphone app, voice controls, or a pet-hair filter (like Maytag's Pet Pro MVW6500MBK, $1,235).

▶ **Top-load HE machines** ($610 to $1,365) **are roomier than agitator models.** Some have large to extra-large capacities of 4.5 to 6.2 cubic feet. Unlike agitator models, they don't fill up with water. Instead, they slosh clothes in only about 13 gallons per load, making them nearly as water-efficient as front-loaders. High spin speeds extract that water, cutting drying time (and energy use).

Some come with smart apps, voice controls, and high-speed wash cycles, but note that HE's high-speed spin cycles tend to tangle clothes.

What to Avoid

Small-capacity top-loaders (of both types) may clean less effectively and leave detergent residue on clothes when overstuffed. Check CR's ratings on gentleness to steer clear of models with aggressive agitators that can damage delicate clothing.

LG WT8600CB
$1,365
85 OVERALL SCORE

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results						Features + Specs					
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Washing performance	Energy efficiency	Water efficiency	Gentleness	Noise	Vibration	Claimed capacity (cu. ft.)	Dimensions (in.)	Cycle time (min.)	Energy Star	WiFi	Steam option
TOP-LOAD HIGH-EFFICIENCY (HE) WASHERS																
✓ **LG** WT8600CB	85	$1,365	⇈	↑	⇈	↑	⇈	↓	↑	⇈	5.5	43x27x29	75	●	●	
✓ **LG** WT8400CW	84	$1,050	⇈	↑	⇈	↑	⇈	↓	↑	⇈	5.5	43x27x29	75	●	●	
✓ **LG** WT7900HBA	83	$1,350	⇈	↑	⇈	↑	⇈	–	–	⇈	5.5	45x27x30	70	●	●	●
✓ **LG** WT7000CW	80	$890	⇈	↑	⇈	↑	↑	–	–	⇈	4.5	45x27x29	80			
Samsung WA52A5500AW	71	$950	–	↓	⇈	⇈	⇈	↓	↑	⇈	5.2	45x28x29	90	●	●	
Samsung WA55A7300AE	68	$1,200	–	↓	⇈	⇈	↑	↓	–	⇈	5.5	46x28x29	95	●	●	
Samsung WA55CG7100AW	68	$1,000	–	↓	↑	⇈	⇈	–	↑	⇈	5.5	46x27x29	90	●	●	
GE Profile PTW900BPTRS	67	$1,235	–	↓	⇈	↑	–	–	–	⇈	5.4	44x28x29	100	●	●	
GE Profile PTW700BSTWS	65	$950	–	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	–	⇈	5.4	44x28x29	100	●	●	
Samsung WA47CG3500AW	64	$900	–	↓	–	↑	↑	–	↑	⇈	4.7	45x27x29	65		●	
Maytag MVW7232HW	63	$1,090	–	–	↑	↑	–	–	–	⇈	5.3	44x27x28	55	●	●	
Samsung WA54CG7150AW	63	$1,000	–	↓	–	⇈	⇈	–	–	⇈	5.4	44x27x29	90	●	●	
GE GTW500ASNWS	63	$800	–	↓	↑	↑	↑	–	–	⇈	4.6	44x27x27	55	●		
GE Profile PTW600BSRWS	62	$900	–	↓	↑	⇈	–	↓	↓	⇈	5.0	44x28x29	105	●	●	
Whirlpool WTW8127LC	61	$1,330	–	–	–	↑	–	–	–	⇈	5.2	43x27x28	60	●	●	

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results						Features + Specs					
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Washing performance	Energy efficiency	Water efficiency	Gentleness	Noise	Vibration	Claimed capacity (cu. ft.)	Dimensions (in.)	Cycle time (min.)	Energy Star	WiFi	Steam option
TOP-LOAD HIGH-EFFICIENCY (HE) WASHERS *Continued*																
Whirlpool WTW5057LW	57	$900									4.8	42x27x28	60			
Maytag MVW5430MW	56	$855									4.8	44x27x28	65			
Whirlpool WTW4950HW	55	$715									3.9	44x27x27	45			
Whirlpool WTW6157PW	53	$1,000									5.3	42x27x21	50	●		
Whirlpool WTW6150PW	53	$1,000									5.3	40x28x28	50	●		
Maytag MVW6200KW	50	$950									4.8	42x27x28	60			
Samsung WA41A3000AW	43	$725									4.1	44x27x29	75			
Avanti STW30D0W	40	$610	–	–							3.0	39x24x23	35			
TOP-LOAD AGITATORS																
✓ **LG** WT8405CW	81	$1,035	–	–							5.3	43x27x29	90	●	●	
✓ **LG** WT7005CW	79	$875	–	–							4.3	45x27x29	70			
✓ **Samsung** WA49B5105AW	75	$980	–	–							4.9	46x28x29	75			
✓ **Samsung** WA46CG3505AW	72	$900	–	–							4.6	46x27x29	65		●	
✓ **Samsung** WA54CG7105AD	70	$1,000	–	–							5.4	44x27x29	100	●	●	
✓ **Samsung** WA49B5205AW	68	$900	–	–							4.9	45x28x29	80	●		
✓ **GE** Profile PTW705BSTWS	66	$950									5.3	44x28x29	105	●	●	
Speed Queen TC5003WN	64	$1,480									3.2	43x26x28	55			
Maytag MVW7230HW	64	$1,150									5.2	44x27x28	55	●	●	
Maytag MVW6230HW	63	$1,000									4.7	42x27x28	65		●	
GE Profile PTW605BSRWS	62	$855									4.9	44x28x29	105	●	●	
Speed Queen TR7003WN	62	$1,560									3.2	43x24x28	70			
GE GTW585BSVWS	62	$850									4.5	44x27x27	50			
Whirlpool WTW8127LC	61	$1,330									5.2	44x27x28	60	●	●	
Avanti SLTW37D0W	61	$810	–	–							3.7	42x25x27	55			
Insignia NS-TWM41WH8A	61	$550	–	–							4.1	44x27x29	80			
Amana NTW4519JW	60	$565									3.8	44x27x26	40			
LG WT6105CW	59	$725	–	–							4.1	45x27x29	45			
Midea MLTW44A4BWW	58	$775	–	–							4.4	45x27x30	85		●	
Frigidaire FFTW4120SW	58	$790									4.1	44x27x29	80			
Kenmore 22352	57	$700									4.2	43x27x28	55			
Maytag MVW5035MW	57	$820									4.5	44x27x28	65			
Whirlpool WTW5057LW	57	$900									4.7	42x27x28	60			

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results						Features + Specs					
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Washing performance	Energy efficiency	Water efficiency	Gentleness	Noise	Vibration	Claimed capacity (cu. ft.)	Dimensions (in.)	Cycle time (min.)	Energy Star	WiFi	Steam option
TOP-LOAD AGITATORS *Continued*																
Maytag MVWC465HW	57	$800									3.8	44x27x27	45			
Whirlpool WTW5015LW	56	$805									4.5	42x27x28	60			
GE GTW385ASWWS	56	$700									4.3	44x27x27	45			
Whirlpool WTW4957PW	55	$750									3.8	44x27x27	50			
Maytag MVW6500MBK	52	$1,235									4.7	43x27x28	60			
Hotpoint HTW240ASKWS	51	$580									3.6	44x27x27	50			
Kenmore 20362	51	$700									3.8	44x27x26	45			
Samsung WA40A3005AW	50	$690	–	–							4.0	44x27x29	70			
Maytag MVW4505MW	50	$765									4.5	44x27x28	60			
Kenmore 20232	35	$660									3.5	44x27x26	70			
Amana NTW4516FW	31	$635									3.5	43x27x27	50			
Midea MLTW41A1BWW	30	$715	–	–							4.1	42x26x28	50			
Insignia NS-TWM35W1	30	$450	–	–							3.7	43x25x27	50			

HOW WE TEST: **Overall Score** combines test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. **Predicted reliability** estimates the likelihood that newly purchased models from a given brand will develop problems or break within the first five years. Findings are based on CR's 2021, 2022, and 2023 Fall Quarterly Surveys. **Owner satisfaction** reflects the proportion of CR members who are extremely likely to recommend the washing machine they bought. In cases where we have insufficient survey data to provide a brand-level rating, indicated by a gray dash (–), the model receives weighted category average scores for reliability and satisfaction. **Washing performance** reflects the degree of stain removal from fabric using the most aggressive normal cycle. **Energy efficiency** is based on the energy needed to heat the water using a warm wash and cold rinse, to run the washer, and to extract the remaining moisture left at the end of a cycle. **Water efficiency** is based on total water used when washing an 8-pound load (6 pounds for compacts). Models that earn lower scores for **gentleness** are more likely to treat your clothes roughly, causing wear and tear. **Noise** reflects panelists' judgments during the fill, wash, drain, and spin cycles. **Vibration** reflects use on a suspended wooden floor. Eco-friendly **Green Choice** washers are marked by a green leaf icon that signifies they're reliable, energy- and water-efficient, gentler on clothes, and carry less weight and volume. **Price** is approximate retail.

TOP PICKS

Top-Load Washers

TOP-RATED AGITATOR

LG WT8405CW

$1,035

81 OVERALL SCORE

Excellent overall performance and impressive efficiency make this a solid choice.

HIGH-TECH HE TOP-LOADER

GE Profile PTW700BSTWS

$950

65 OVERALL SCORE

Using a smartphone app, this machine accepts voice or text commands, answers questions, and offers cleaning guidance.

WORSE – BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR GREEN CHOICE

Clothes Dryers

Clothes dryers have a very simple job, and most do it well. The best models get that task done quickly—and don't hike up your energy bill. We rate electric and gas dryers. Most new purchases (80 percent) are electric models, but both types perform similarly in our tests.

EXPERT TIP

"Look for a dryer with a moisture sensor. It will more accurately measure the dryness of the load. If you use dryer sheets, clean the sensor periodically with a cotton ball and a little rubbing alcohol."

RICH HANDEL
CR Laundry Test Engineer

LG DLEX6700B
$1,535
85 OVERALL SCORE

How to Shop

Electric dryers ($450 to $2,500) need a 240-volt connection to produce the heat needed to dry clothes. Gas dryers ($550 to $2,560) burn natural gas or propane and require a 120-volt electrical outlet. While gas dryers can cost a bit more than electric dryers, natural gas costs less than electricity in some areas. Also keep in mind that installing a new gas line can cost more than $500.

▶ **Dryers with top performance scores will do their job faster and better.** In our tests, we time how long it takes to run loads on the minimum and maximum dryness settings. We want to see if laundry comes out damp on the former (so you can damp-iron if you like) and dry (but not damaged by the high heat) on the latter. Capacity is important, too; you'll find a column for that in our ratings. A dryer with a claimed capacity of around 9 cubic feet, among the biggest we've tested, should fit about 17 full-sized bath towels.

▶ **Most dryers have become more energy-efficient.** Two extra-efficient types are also gaining popularity: condensing and heat pump models. Condensing dryers heat clothes with hot air in the drum, then drain off the moisture. Heat pump dryers generate heat outside the drum, removing moisture through an evaporator that recycles warm, damp air into hot air in a repetitive process. Both take longer to dry clothes than traditional dryers (sometimes hours longer). But they're more energy-efficient, so they can save you money. Models designated Energy Star Most Efficient may be eligible for special rebates, depending on where you live. Another benefit: Unlike standard dryers, condensing and heat pump dryers don't need a vent—but they might require a drain line to remove water extracted during drying.

What to Avoid

Don't buy an energy hog. Look for Energy Star certified models; they use 20 percent less energy than those without that designation. Also, make sure the installer doesn't use a foil accordion-style vent, which can trap lint, creating a fire hazard. Instead, go with a rigid metal duct with smooth walls to allow the free flow of air.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results			Features + Specs						
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Drying performance	Convenience	Noise	Claimed capacity (cu. ft.)	Dimensions (in.)	Energy Star	Stackable	WiFi	Steam option	Moisture sensor
ELECTRIC DRYERS														
✓ **LG** DLEX8600BE	85	$1,345	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	–	⌃	7.3	43x27x30	●		●	●	●
✓ **LG** DLEX6700B	85	$1,535	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	–	⌃	7.4	39x27x30	●	●	●	●	●
✓ **LG** DLEX6500W	85	$1,300	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	7.4	39x27x30	●	●	●	●	●
LG DLEX5500W	84	$1,200	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	7.4	39x27x30	●	●	●	●	●
LG DLE7400WE	84	$1,050	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	–	⌃	7.3	45x27x30	●		●		●
LG DLE3470W	84	$1,035	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	7.4	39x27x30	●	●			●
LG Signature DLEX9500K	84	$1,900	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	9.0	41x29x33			●	●	●
LG DLE6100W	82	$725	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	–	⌃	7.3	45x27x30	●				●
LG DLEX8900B	81	$1,535	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	9.0	41x29x33	●	●	●	●	●
LG DLE7000W	81	$880	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	–	⌃	7.3	45x27x30	●				●
LG DLE7150W	80	$975	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	–	–	7.3	45x27x29	●				●
Samsung FlexDryer DVE60A9900V	77	$1,900	–	⌄	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	7.5	47x27x32	●		●	●	●
GE GFD85ESPNRS	75	$1,100	–	⌄	⌃	⌃	⌃	7.8	40x28x32	●	●	●	●	●
Amana NED5800HW	75	$950	⌃	⌄	⌃	–	⌃	7.4	39x27x30	●	●			●
GE Profile PFD87ESPVRS	75	$1,400	–	⌄	⌃	–	⌃	7.8	40x28x32	●	●	●	●	●
Samsung DVE45T6000W	75	$840	–	⌄	⌃	⌃	⌃	7.5	39x27x30		●			●
Samsung DVE50A8500V	74	$1,215	–	⌄	⌃	⌃	⌃	7.5	39x27x32	●	●	●	●	●
Samsung DVE45B6300W	74	$1,015	–	⌄	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	7.5	39x27x31		●	●	●	●
Whirlpool WED9620HC	74	$1,690	⌃	–	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	7.4	38x27x32	●	●	●	●	●

PHOTO: MANUFACTURER

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results			Features + Specs						
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Drying performance	Convenience	Noise	Claimed capacity (cu. ft.)	Dimensions (in.)	Energy Star	Stackable	WiFi	Steam option	Moisture sensor
ELECTRIC DRYERS *Continued*														
Samsung DVE55CG7100W	73	$1,000						7.4	46x27x30	●		●	●	●
Samsung DVE55A7300E	73	$1,170						7.4	46x27x30	●		●	●	●
Samsung DVE54CG7150W	73	$1,050						7.4	46x27x30			●	●	●
Maytag MED8630HC	73	$1,500						7.3	39x27x31	●	●	●	●	●
Whirlpool WED6605MW	73	$1,015						7.4	39x27x31	●	●		●	●
Samsung DVE51CG8000W	73	$1,000						7.5	39x27x30	●	●	●		●
GE Profile PTD70EBSTWS	73	$975						7.4	44x27x31			●	●	●
Maytag MED7230HW	73	$1,090						7.4	43x27x30	●		●	●	●
Samsung DVE46BG6500V	73	$1,055						7.5	39x27x31	●	●	●	●	●
GE Profile PFD95ESPTDS	72	$1,445						7.8	40x28x31	●	●	●	●	●
Samsung Bespoke DVE53BB8900T	72	$1,555						7.6	39x27x32	●	●	●	●	●
Samsung DVE47CG3500W	71	$900						7.4	45x27x30			●		●
GE Profile PTD60EBSRWS	71	$880						7.4	44x27x31			●		●
Insignia NS-TDRE67W1	71	$450	–	–				6.7	42x27x30					●
Whirlpool WED7120HW	70	$1,150						7.4	43x27x30	●		●	●	●
Whirlpool WED5605MW	70	$925						7.4	38x27x31	●	●			●
Samsung DVE52A5500W	70	$900						7.4	45x27x30			●	●	●
Electrolux ELFE7537AW	70	$1,215						8.0	38x27x32	●	●		●	●
GE GTD58EBSVWS	70	$850						7.4	44x27x30					●
Speed Queen DF7004WE	70	$2,415						7.0	41x27x29	●			●	●
Electrolux ELFE7437AW	70	$1,100						8.0	38x27x32	●	●		●	●
Midea MLE41N1AWW	70	$680	–	–				6.7	44x27x30					●
Maytag MED6630HW	70	$1,045						7.3	39x27x31	●	●		●	●
Samsung DVE45T3200W	69	$690						7.2	44x27x30					●
Frigidaire FFRE4120SW	69	$765						6.7	43x27x29					●
GE Profile PTD90EBPTRS	67	$1,220						7.3	44x27x31	●		●	●	●
Electrolux ELFE7637AW	67	$1,250						8.0	38x27x32	●	●		●	●
Electrolux EFDE317TIW	66	$1,100						8.0	38x27x31	●	●			●
Samsung DVE41A3000W	66	$710						7.2	44x27x30					●
Whirlpool WED8127LC	66	$1,365						7.4	43x27x30	●		●	●	●
Maytag MED6500MBK	65	$1,255						7.0	41x29x29				●	●
Insignia NS-FDRE67WH8A	65	$550	–	–				6.7	43x27x31					●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results			Features + Specs						
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Drying performance	Convenience	Noise	Claimed capacity (cu. ft.)	Dimensions (in.)	Energy Star	Stackable	WiFi	Steam option	Moisture sensor
ELECTRIC DRYERS *Continued*														
Kenmore 61112	64	$1,110						7.4	41x27x30					●
Whirlpool WED5010LW	64	$830						7.0	41x29x28					●
Maytag MED6200KW	63	$950						7.0	42x29x29					●
Whirlpool WED5050LW	63	$880						7.0	41x29x28				●	●
Kenmore 62332	62	$665						7.0	44x29x27					
Whirlpool WED500RLW	62	$1,035						7.0	41x29x29					●
GE GTD45EASJWS	61	$760						7.2	43x27x30					●
Kenmore 65132	60	$600						7.0	43x29x28					●
Maytag MED5030MW	59	$820						7.0	43x29x28					●
Whirlpool WHD862CHC	57	$1,985						7.4	39x27x31	●	●			●
Speed Queen DC5003WE	57	$1,305						7.0	43x27x28					
GE GTD33EASKWW	57	$665						7.2	44x27x30					
Maytag MED4500MW	56	$775						7.0	43x29x30					
Kenmore 60222	56	$620						6.5	44x29x28					
GE GTD42EASJWW	54	$760						7.2	44x27x30					●
Amana NED4655EW	51	$600						6.5	43x29x28					
Whirlpool WED4950HW	51	$550						7.0	43x29x29					
GE GTD38EASWWS	48	$700						7.2	45x27x30					
GE GTX52EASP	47	$970						6.2	44x27x27					
Hotpoint HTX26EASWWW	45	$600						6.2	44x27x28					
GAS DRYERS														
✓ **LG** DLGX5501W	85	$1,340						7.4	39x27x30	●	●	●	●	●
✓ **LG** DLG7401WE	84	$1,150						7.3	45x27x30	●		●		●
✓ **LG** DLG3471W	84	$1,100						7.4	39x27x30	●	●			●
✓ **LG** DLGX6501W	84	$1,360						7.4	39x27x30	●	●	●	●	●
✓ **LG** DLG8401WE	83	$1,100						7.3	43x27x30	●		●		●
✓ **LG** DLGX7901BE	83	$1,450						7.3	44x27x30	●		●	●	●
✓ **LG** DLGX6701B	83	$1,680						7.4	39x27x30	●	●	●	●	●
✓ **LG** DLG7151W	82	$1,085						7.3	45x27x29	●				●
✓ **LG** Signature DLGX9501K	82	$2,200						9.0	41x29x33			●	●	●
✓ **LG** DLG6101W	82	$825						7.3	45x27x30	●				●
✓ **LG** DLGX8901B	82	$1,565						9.0	41x29x33	●	●	●	●	●

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR GREEN CHOICE

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results			Features + Specs						
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Drying performance	Convenience	Noise	Claimed capacity (cu. ft.)	Dimensions (in.)	Energy Star	Stackable	WiFi	Steam option	Moisture sensor
GAS DRYERS *Continued*														
✓ **LG** DLG7001W	81	$980	⇈	↑	↑	–	↑	7.3	45x27x30	●				●
Samsung DVG50A8500V	78	$1,325	–	↓	⇈	↑	↑	7.5	39x27x32	●	●	●	●	●
Samsung FlexDryer DVG60A9900V	78	$1,890	–	↓	⇈	↑	↑	7.5	47x27x32	●		●	●	●
Samsung DVG50A8600E	78	$1,285	–	↓	↑	↑	↑	7.5	39x27x30	●	●	●	●	●
Samsung DVG51CG8000W	75	$1,100	–	↓	↑	↑	↑	7.5	39x27x30	●	●	●		●
Samsung DVG55A7300E	75	$1,255	–	↓	⇈	–	–	7.4	46x27x30	●		●	●	●
Samsung DVG45T6000W	74	$925	–	↓	↑	↑	↑	7.5	39x27x31		●			●
GE Profile PFD95GSPTDS	74	$1,440	–	↓	↑	↑	↑	7.8	40x28x31	●	●	●	●	●
Samsung Bespoke DVG53BB8900T	74	$1,520	–	↓	↑	–	↑	7.6	39x27x32	●	●	●	●	●
Samsung Bespoke DVG53BB8700TA	74	$1,445	–	↓	↑	↑	↑	7.6	39x27x31	●	●	●	●	●
Samsung DVG45B6300W	74	$1,075	–	↓	↑	↑	↑	7.5	39x27x31		●	●	●	●
Speed Queen DF7004WG	74	$2,560	⇈	⇈	↑	–	–	7.0	41x27x29	●			●	●
Samsung DVG46BG6500V	73	$1,260	–	↓	↑	–	↑	7.5	39x27x31	●	●	●	●	●
Speed Queen DR7004BG	73	$1,655	⇈	⇈	–	–	↑	7.0	44x27x29	●			●	●
Samsung DVG54CG7150W	71	$1,200	–	↓	↑	–	↑	7.4	46x27x30			●	●	●
Insignia NS-TDRG67W1	71	$550	–	–	↑	–	↑	6.7	42x27x30					●
Samsung DVG52A5500W	70	$975	–	↓	↑	–	–	7.4	45x27x30			●	●	●
GE Profile PTD60GBSRWS	70	$1,000	–	↓	↑	–	–	7.4	44x27x31			●		●
Samsung DVG47CG3500W	70	$1,000	–	↓	↑	–	↑	7.4	45x27x30			●		●
Element ETDG6727CW	69	$750	–	–	↑	–	↑	6.7	42x27x29					●
GE Profile PTD70GBSTWS	69	$1,045	–	↓	↑	↑	–	7.4	44x27x31			●	●	●
Midea MLG45N1AWW	68	$850	–	–	↑	↑	↑	8.0	40x27x34	●	●			●
Samsung DVG41A3000W	67	$805	–	↓	↑	–	–	7.2	44x27x30					●
Whirlpool WGD6605MW	67	$1,110	–	–	–	–	↑	7.4	39x27x31	●	●		●	●
Electrolux ELFG7537AW	67	$1,275	–	–	↑	–	↑	8.0	38x27x32	●	●		●	●
Maytag MGD6500MBK	66	$1,330	↑	–	↑	–	–	7.0	41x29x29				●	●
Kenmore 71112	66	$1,240	–	–	↑	↑	–	7.4	41x27x30					●
Whirlpool WGD6620HW	65	$1,250	–	–	–	↑	↑	7.4	39x27x31	●	●		●	●
Whirlpool WGD8127LC	65	$1,425	–	–	–	–	↑	7.4	43x27x30	●		●	●	●
Electrolux ELFG7637AT	65	$1,465	–	–	–	–	↑	8.0	38x27x32	●	●		●	●
Electrolux ELFG7437AW	64	$1,175	–	–	–	–	↑	8.0	38x27x32	●	●		●	●
Whirlpool WGD5010LW	64	$900	–	–	–	↑	–	7.0	41x29x28					●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results			Features + Specs						
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Drying performance	Convenience	Noise	Claimed capacity (cu. ft.)	Dimensions (in.)	Energy Star	Stackable	WiFi	Steam option	Moisture sensor
GAS DRYERS *Continued*														
GE GTD45GASJWS	63	$880						7.2	43x27x30					●
Whirlpool WGD5605MW	62	$1,015						7.4	38x27x31	●	●			●
GE Profile PTD90GBPTRS	62	$1,270						7.3	44x27x31	●		●	●	●
Whirlpool WGD5050LW	62	$950						7.0	41x29x28				●	●
Insignia NS-FDRG67WH8A	62	$650	–	–				6.7	43x27x31					●
Amana NGD5800HW	61	$995						7.4	39x27x30	●	●			●
Maytag MGD6200KW	61	$1,050						7.0	42x29x29					●
Maytag MGD5030MW	60	$890						7.0	43x29x28					●
Whirlpool WGD500RLW	59	$1,100						7.0	41x29x29					●
Speed Queen DC5003WG	57	$1,590						7.0	43x27x28					
Maytag MGD4500MW	56	$850						7.0	43x29x30					
Frigidaire FFRG4120SW	53	$880						6.7	43x27x29					●
Whirlpool WGD4950HW	51	$835						7.0	43x29x29					
Amana NGD4655EW	48	$710						6.5	43x29x28					

HOW WE TEST: **Overall Score** combines performance test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. **Predicted reliability** estimates the likelihood that newly purchased models from a given brand will develop problems or break within the first five years. Findings are from CR's 2021, 2022, and 2023 Fall Quarterly Surveys. **Owner satisfaction** reflects the proportion of CR members who are extremely likely to recommend the clothes dryer they bought. In cases where we have insufficient survey data to provide a brand-level rating, indicated by a gray dash (–), the model gets weighted category average scores for reliability and satisfaction. **Drying performance** combines performance on three types of laundry loads of different sizes and fabric mixes: a 12-pound load, predominantly cotton; an 8-pound load of cotton/polyester-blend clothing; and a 3-pound load of synthetic delicates. **Convenience** is judged on controls and ergonomics, such as ease of loading and unloading, and cleaning the lint filter. **Noise** level is determined by a panel of judges who listen while the machines dry an 8-pound load, judging both sound quality and volume. **Price** is approximate retail.

TOP PICKS

Clothes Dryers

VERSATILE ELECTRIC OPTION

Samsung FlexDryer DVE60A9900V
$1,900

77 OVERALL SCORE

Separate compartments let you dry delicates in a small chamber and a large load in the main drum at once.

VALUE-PRICED GAS DRYER

LG DLG6101W
$825

82 OVERALL SCORE

This impressive, efficient gas dryer falls just 3 points shy of our top-rated model and saves you more than $500.

PHOTOS, THIS PAGE AND NEXT SPREAD: MANUFACTURERS

WORSE – BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED

Washer/Dryer Pairs

If you're buying a washer and dryer at the same time, it makes sense to choose models that are designed to go together. That's not just for a matching look: A compatible pair will have complementary cycles. (With some smart pairs, the washer can even tell the dryer which cycle to use for the best results.) Some smart pairs also allow you to control both machines from the washer's control panel, which is handy if you're shorter and a stacked dryer is hard to reach.

EXPERT TIP

"Brands like LG and retailers like Best Buy might offer discount deals for purchasing a matching laundry set, which can save you hundreds of dollars."

ALLIE CHILICKI
CR Laundry
Market Analyst

LG WM6500HWA *washer*
LG DLEX6500W *dryer*
$2,600
84 OVERALL SCORE

How to Shop

Our ratings pair washers with their recommended electric dryers. They're shown below and on the following page.

▶ **Choose your washer first.** Once you settle on one with the capacity, cycles, and features that are important to you (see our washing machine ratings, starting on page 77), look at the matching dryer recommended by the manufacturer. (Dryer ratings start on page 83.)

▶ **Need a gas dryer?** Make sure that option is available in the model you select. If you intend to stack your pair, confirm that the machines are stackable. (Our ratings identify those that are.)

What to Avoid

Don't buy an unmatched washer and dryer, especially if you intend to stack them. Designated pairs are roughly the same size, so you can combine them with a customized stacking kit. If you do buy an unmatched set, make sure the dryer's capacity is sufficient to handle the washer's largest load.

FRONT-LOAD PAIRS

LG WM5500HWA *washer*
LG DLEX5500W *dryer*
$2,400
84 OVERALL SCORE

LG WM6700HBA *washer*
LG DLEX6700B *dryer*
$3,250
83 OVERALL SCORE

LG WM3470CW *washer*
LG DLE3470W *dryer*
$2,000
83 OVERALL SCORE

Samsung WF45B6300AW *washer*
Samsung DVE45B6300W *dryer*
$1,890
77 OVERALL SCORE

Electrolux ELFW7537AW *washer*
Electrolux ELFE7537AW *dryer*
$2,070
77 OVERALL SCORE

Maytag MHW8630HC *washer*
Maytag MED8630HC *dryer*
$2,745
77 OVERALL SCORE

Samsung WF45T6000AW *washer*
Samsung DVE45T6000W *dryer*
$1,800
77 OVERALL SCORE

Samsung WF51CG8000AW *washer*
Samsung DVE51CG8000W *dryer*
$2,000
76 OVERALL SCORE

TOP-LOAD HIGH EFFICIENCY PAIRS

LG WT8600CB *washer*
LG DLEX8600BE *dryer*
$2,710
85 OVERALL SCORE

LG WT7000CW *washer*
LG DLE7000W *dryer*
$1,700
80 OVERALL SCORE

Samsung WA55CG7100AW *washer*
Samsung DVE55CG7100W *dryer*
$2,000
70 OVERALL SCORE

TOP-LOAD HIGH EFFICIENCY PAIRS *Continued*

GE Profile PTW700BSTWS *washer*
GE Profile PTD70EBSTWS *dryer*
$1,620
68 OVERALL SCORE

GE Profile PTW900BPTRS *washer*
GE Profile PTD90EBPTRS *dryer*
$1,820
67 OVERALL SCORE

Samsung WA54CG7150AW *washer*
Samsung DVE54CG7150W *dryer*
$1,600
66 OVERALL SCORE

Samsung WA47CG3500AW *washer*
Samsung DVE47CG3500W *dryer*
$1,710
66 OVERALL SCORE

GE Profile PTW600BSRWS *washer*
GE Profile PTD60EBSRWS *dryer*
$1,400
65 OVERALL SCORE

TOP-LOAD AGITATOR PAIRS

Samsung WA46CG3505AW *washer*
Samsung DVE47CG3500W *dryer*
$1,710
72 OVERALL SCORE

Samsung WA54CG7105AD *washer*
Samsung DVE55CG7100W *dryer*
$1,800
71 OVERALL SCORE

GE Profile PTW705BSTWS *washer*
GE Profile PTD70EBSTWS *dryer*
$1,555
68 OVERALL SCORE

LG WT6105CW *washer*
LG DLE6100W *dryer*
$1,500
66 OVERALL SCORE

GE Profile PTW605BSRWS *washer*
GE Profile PTD60EBSRWS *dryer*
$1,440
65 OVERALL SCORE

GE GTW585BSVWS *washer*
GE GTD58EBSVWS *dryer*
$1,700
64 OVERALL SCORE

Whirlpool WTW8127LC *washer*
Whirlpool WED8127LC *dryer*
$2,210
63 OVERALL SCORE

Insignia NS-TWM41WH8A *washer*
Insignia NS-FDRE67WH8A *dryer*
$1,015
62 OVERALL SCORE

COMPACT PAIRS

Miele WXI860WCS *washer*
Miele TXI680WP *dryer*
$3,600
83 OVERALL SCORE

LG WM1455HWA *washer*
LG DLHC1455W *dryer*
$2,400
78 OVERALL SCORE

Samsung WW25B6900AW *washer*
Samsung DV25B6900HW *dryer*
$1,950
76 OVERALL SCORE

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR GREEN CHOICE

All-in-One Washer/Dryers

Samsung WD53DBA900HZ
$2,200
71 OVERALL SCORE

These newer machines wash and dry in the same drum, eliminating the need to transfer wet clothes from washer to dryer. The ones we've tested offer great washing performance, but because they take hours to dry clothes, their drying performance scores are all subpar.

How to Shop

Because these combo units use either condensation technology or an energy-efficient heat pump to remove moisture from clothes, they take longer—up to 3½ hours—to dry a load. But they're ventless, using a drain or water-collecting reservoir for moisture removal rather than an exhaust vent to the outdoors.

▶ **The four all-in-ones we tested run on 120 volts** instead of the 240 volts required for most traditional dryers. This, plus the lack of a vent hose, means you can place the unit along any wall with a water line.

▶ **All-in-ones are typically a few inches larger than a standard front-load washer in one or more direction,** so measure your space carefully. They range from $1,550 to about $3,000.

What to Avoid

If you like to do your laundry quickly, avoid a combination machine altogether. You won't be able to wash one load while the other dries, either. They also leave clothes feeling slightly damp, so if you love the crisp warmth of clothes straight from the dryer, an all-in-one may not be for you.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results									Features + Specs				
			Washing performance	Washer energy efficiency	Water efficiency	Washer gentleness	Washer noise	Washer vibration	Drying performance	Dryer convenience	Dryer noise	Claimed capacity (cu. ft.)	Dimensions (in.)	Energy Star	WiFi	Dryer moisture sensor
ALL-IN-ONE WASHER/DRYERS																
Samsung WD53DBA900HZ	71	$2,200	⇈	⇈	⇈	!	^	^	v	!	⇈	5.3	44x27x35	●	●	
LG WM6998HBA	69	$3,000	^	⇈	⇈	!	^	!	v	^	⇈	5.0	39x27x33	●	●	
GE Profile PFQ97HSPVDS	64	$2,195	^	⇈	⇈	^	^	!	v	!	^	4.8	47x28x32	●	●	●
Whirlpool WFC682CLW	60	$1,550	^	⇈	⇈	^	^	^	v	v	⇊	4.5	39x27x32	●		

Compact Washers & Dryers

As you might expect, compact washers and dryers are typically small (about 24 inches wide) and have a limited capacity—up to 2.7 cubic feet for washers and 5.1 cubic feet for dryers. Despite their size, compact washers usually offer impressive washing performance and can be very water- and energy-efficient.

Samsung WW25B6900AW
washer
$1,000
75 OVERALL SCORE

Samsung DV25B6900HW
dryer
$1,065
78 OVERALL SCORE

How to Shop

Compact washers are typically front-loaders (see page 77 for full details on those), and pairs are usually stackable, so they don't have a large footprint.

▶ **Look for Energy Star certified compacts for the best water and energy efficiency.** Models with CR's Green Choice designation, identified with a green leaf in our ratings, have been determined to have the least impact on the environment, taking into account not just the energy they consume but also the materials and resources needed to produce (and ultimately discard) them.

▶ **Compact machines can get pricey.** Despite their diminutive dimensions, they cost as much as full-sized machines. You'll usually get a better deal if you shop for a set. (You can save nearly $300 on the top-rated compact pair compared with purchasing the washer and dryer separately.) Compact washers in our ratings range from $780 to $2,100, and compact dryers from $880 to $1,800.

▶ **Some lower-priced models may seem appealing up front but will cost you more in the long run** if they lack Energy Star certification or features such as a moisture sensor, which shuts off the machine when clothes are finished drying.

What to Avoid

Compact machines tend to vibrate, so check our ratings to find models that are more stable. During installation, make sure your compact washer is properly leveled. If vibration becomes a problem, using a lower spin speed may help. If you can, steer clear of the smallest compacts, those with capacities of less than 2 cubic feet. You might be frustrated by the need to do seemingly endless small loads.

EXPERT TIP

"Both compacts and all-in-one washer/dryers have smaller-capacity drums than conventional washers and dryers, but compacts are generally better than all-in-ones at drying clothes."

PATRICK SEVERIN
CR laundry test engineer

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results: Predicted reliability	Survey Results: Owner satisfaction	Test Results: Washing performance	Test Results: Energy efficiency	Test Results: Water efficiency	Test Results: Gentleness	Test Results: Noise	Test Results: Vibration	Features + Specs: Claimed capacity (cu. ft.)	Features + Specs: Dimensions (in.)	Features + Specs: Cycle time (min.)	Features + Specs: Energy Star	Features + Specs: Stackable	Features + Specs: WiFi	Features + Specs: Steam option
COMPACT WASHERS																	
✓ **Miele** WXI860WCS	85	$2,100	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	↑	↑	–	2.3	33x24x25	100	●	●	●	●
✓ **LG** WM1455HWA	82	$1,340	⏫	–	⏫	↑	⏫	↑	↑	–	2.4	34x24x25	90	●	●	●	●
✓ **Electrolux** ELFW4222AW	81	$1,225	⏫	–	⏫	↑	⏫	↑	–	↑	2.4	34x24x26	65	●	●		●
✓ **Samsung** WW25B6900AW	75	$1,000	↑	–	–	⏫	⏫	↑	↑	–	2.5	34x24x27	100	●	●	●	●
Haier QFW150SSNWW	72	$1,075	–	–	↑	⏫	⏫	↑	↑	–	2.4	34x26x26	100	●	●	●	●
GE GFW148SSMWW	69	$1,045	–	⏬	↑	⏫	⏫	↑	↑	↓	2.4	34x24x26	95	●	●		●
Blomberg WM98220SX	69	$1,430	–	–	↑	⏫	⏫	↑	–	↓	2.3	34x24x23	80	●	●	●	●
Midea MLH25N7BWW	63	$860	–	–	–	⏫	↓	–	–	↓	2.5	34x24x24	70	●	●		●
Equator 835	62	$1,060	–	–	–	↑	↑	↑	–	↓	1.9	34x24x25	70		●		
Asko W4114CW	59	$2,050	↓	–	↑	↑	↑	↓	–	↓	2.7	33x24x28	85		●		●
Whirlpool WFW3090JW	49	$1,100	⏬	⏬	↓	⏫	⏫	⏫	↑	–	2.0	33x24x24	55	●	●		
Insignia NS-FWM27W1	47	$780	–	–	↓	⏫	↓	↑	–	↓	2.7	33x23x26	60	●	●		
Magic Chef MCSFLW27W	41	$1,020	–	–	↓	↑	↓	↑	–	↓	2.7	33x23x26	65	●	●		
Black+Decker BFLW27MW	38	$870	–	–	↓	↑	↓	↑	–	↓	2.7	33x23x26	60	●	●		

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score, predicted reliability, owner satisfaction, washing performance, energy efficiency, water efficiency, gentleness, noise, and **vibration** are all calculated using the same criteria we use for full-sized washers (see page 81), but for compacts we use a smaller, 6-pound load. In cases where we have insufficient survey data to provide a brand-level rating, indicated by a gray dash (–), the model receives weighted category average scores for reliability and satisfaction. **Green Choice** signifies they are the most eco-friendly models in our tests. **Price** is approximate retail.

PHOTOS, THIS SPREAD AND PREVIOUS SPREAD: MANUFACTURERS

Compact Washers & Dryers

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results			Features + Specs						
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Drying performance	Convenience	Noise	Claimed capacity (cu. ft.)	Dimensions (in.)	Energy Star	Stackable	WiFi	Steam option	Moisture sensor
COMPACT DRYERS														
Samsung DV25B6900EW	81	$1,065	↑	↓	↑	–	↑	4.0	34x24x26	●	●	●		●
Miele TXI680WP	79	$1,800	⇈	⇈	↑	↑	↑	4.0	34x24x25	●	●	●	●	●
Samsung DV25B6900HW	78	$1,065	↑	↓	↑	↑	⇈	4.0	34x24x26	●	●	●		●
LG DLHC1455W	71	$1,330	↑	–	↑	–	⇈	4.2	34x24x26	●	●	●		●
Insignia NS-FDRE44W1	68	$880	–	–	↑	–	↑	4.4	33x24x26	●	●			●
Asko T411VDW	67	$1,500	–	↓	↑	⇈	–	5.1	34x24x30		●			●
Bosch 500 Series WQB245B0UC	65	$1,500	↓	–	↑	↑	⇈	4.0	34x24x26	●	●	●		●
Bosch 800 Series WTG865H4UC	65	$1,750	↓	–	↑	↑	↑	4.0	34x24x25	●	●	●		●
GE GFD14ESSNWW	63	$1,120	–	⇊	↑	↑	–	4.3	34x24x26	●	●			●
Haier QFT15ESSNWW	54	$1,000	–	–	–	–	–	4.1	34x24x26	●	●	●		●
Electrolux ELFE4222AW	50	$1,170	↓	–	↓	–	⇈	4.0	34x24x26	●	●			●

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score, predicted reliability, owner satisfaction, drying performance, convenience, and **noise** are all calculated using the same criteria we use for full-sized dryers (see page 87), but for compacts we use a smaller, 6-pound load. In cases where we have insufficient survey data to provide a brand-level rating, indicated by a gray dash (–), the model receives weighted category average scores for reliability and satisfaction. **Green Choice** dryers are marked by a green leaf icon that signifies they're the most eco-friendly models in our tests. **Price** is approximate retail.

TOP PICKS

Compact Washer & Dryer

BEST COMPACT WASHER

Miele WXI860WCS

$2,100

85 OVERALL SCORE

Our top-ranked compact model excels in cleaning and is highly reliable, according to our surveys.

VERY GOOD MATCHING DRYER

Miele TXI680WP

$1,800

79 OVERALL SCORE

This model goes well with the washer at left—and it's a terrific performer on its own, too.

PHOTOS: MANUFACTURERS

WORSE ⇊ ↓ – ↑ ⇈ BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY | CR GREEN CHOICE

Laundry Detergents

Bottom line: A detergent should remove dirt and stains well. You may also want a product that has brightening power. Or fewer allergens. Or less of an environmental impact. You'll find great options for each among the many products we tested.

Tide Plus Ultra Stain Release
$21 for 56 oz.
84 OVERALL SCORE

How to Shop

Your main choices are liquids, pods, sheets, and powders. (CR recently began testing powders again; ratings are forthcoming.) The best one depends on what's most important to you.

- **Some detergents excel at stain removal, others are gentle on your skin or the environment, and still others add fragrance.** No single detergent, though, manages to excel in all three areas. Eco-friendly products, for example, generally contain chemicals that—while safer—often don't clean well, and detergents with fragrances can irritate the skin.
- **Our tests show that liquids clean the best.** Persil and Tide are very good, even in hard water. Oxi detergents will brighten whites well. But it's easy to use more liquid than you need. (Even a large load needs only about 5 ounces, or a little more than half a cup). Plus, those big plastic jugs of liquid detergent can be heavy—and they add to waste. There are a few liquids that come packaged in a cardboard box, like Tide Eco Box Original, $42 for 105 ounces.
- **Detergent pods also clean well.** But because they pose dangers from accidental ingestion, CR doesn't recommend them for households with young children or mentally impaired adults.
- **Laundry sheets, which are packaged in cardboard and dissolve in the wash, are marketed as a green alternative.** But they don't work well in our cleaning tests.
- **Many washing machine manufacturers recommend low-sudsing high-efficiency (HE) detergents for front-load and HE top-load washers.** If you have hard water, pick a detergent with a good score in our hard-water test.

What to Avoid

If you have allergies or skin sensitivities, steer clear of scented detergents, particularly those containing sodium laureth sulfate or sodium lauryl sulfate, which can cause skin irritation.

EXPERT TIP

"If you're loyal to a particular brand, check your store's weekly markdowns to find deals, and sign in to its app for digital coupons."

KELLY MOOMEY
CR Laundry Detergent Market Analyst

Laundry Detergents

Brand + Product	Overall Score	Pricing			Test Results									
		Per package	Package size	Price per load	Body oil	Dirt	Salad dressing	Coffee	Chocolate	Grass	Blood	Pretreat	Hard water	For sensitive skin
LIQUIDS														
✓ **Tide** Plus Ultra Stain Release	84	$21	46 oz.	88¢	⏫	⏫	⏫	➖	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	
✓ **Tide** Plus Ultra Oxi	83	$13	84 oz.	22¢	⏫	🔼	⏫	➖	⏫	🔼	➖	⏫	🔼	
✓ **Tide** Plus Hygienic Clean Heavy Duty 10X	80	$13	84 oz.	22¢	⏫	🔼	⏫	➖	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	
✓ **Tide** Plus Ultra Oxi with Odor Eliminators	76	$19	115 oz.	26¢	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔽	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	
✓ **Kirkland Signature (Costco)** Ultra Clean Liquid	76	$20	194 oz.	14¢	⏫	🔼	⏫	➖	🔼	➖	🔽	🔼	🔼	
Persil Activewear Clean	74	$13	100 oz.	26¢	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏬	⏫	➖	🔼	🔼	🔼	
Tide Eco-Box Original	74	$42	105 oz.	44¢	⏫	➖	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	➖	🔼	🔼	
Tide Plus Bleach Alternative	72	$17	84 oz.	29¢	⏫	🔼	⏫	➖	🔼	➖	➖	🔼	➖	
Persil Advanced Clean Oxi+Odor Power	71	$13	100 oz.	26¢	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏬	⏫	➖	🔼	🔼	🔼	
Kirkland Signature (Costco) Ultra Clean Free & Clear	69	$20	194 oz.	14¢	🔼	🔼	⏫	➖	🔼	🔽	➖	🔼	➖	●
Persil Everyday Clean Original	68	$20	150 oz.	21¢	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏬	⏫	➖	🔼	🔼	🔼	
Persil Everyday Clean Intense Fresh	68	$20	150 oz.	21¢	🔼	⏫	🔼	⏬	⏫	➖	🔼	🔼	🔼	
Tide Plus Hygienic Clean 10X Heavy Duty Free/Nature	67	$29	149 oz.	27¢	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔽	🔼	🔽	🔼	🔼	🔼	●
Member's Mark (Sam's Club) Ultimate Clean	67	$16	196 oz.	13¢	🔼	🔼	⏫	➖	🔼	🔽	🔽	🔼	➖	
OxiClean High Def Liquid	67	$37	60 oz.	93¢	🔼	➖	🔼	➖	🔼	➖	➖	🔼	➖	
Tide Zero	65	$17	84 oz.	27¢	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔽	⏫	🔽	⏫	🔼	➖	
All Free Clear Stainlifter with Odor Relief	65	$21	141 oz.	27¢	⏫	🔼	🔼	➖	🔼	🔽	🔽	🔼	➖	●
Presto Premium Liquid	64	$20	82.5 oz.	18¢	🔼	➖	🔼	➖	🔼	➖	🔽	🔼	➖	
Tide Free & Gentle Liquid	62	$20	132 oz.	20¢	🔼	➖	🔼	🔽	🔼	🔽	🔽	🔼	🔽	●
Tide Plus Downy Free	61	$20	132 oz.	20¢	➖	🔼	🔼	🔽	⏫	🔽	⏫	🔼	➖	●
All Oxi Stainlifter	61	$16	141 oz.	20¢	🔼	➖	🔼	➖	➖	🔽	🔽	🔼	➖	
All Oxi Plus Odorlifter	59	$4	36 oz.	20¢	🔼	➖	➖	🔽	🔼	🔽	🔼	🔼	🔽	
Dreft Free & Gentle	59	$17	92 oz.	27¢	🔼	➖	🔼	⏬	⏫	🔽	⏫	🔼	➖	●
Up & Up (Target) Free+Clear	56	$10	150 oz.	10¢	🔼	➖	➖	🔽	🔼	🔽	🔼	🔼	➖	●
Arm & Hammer Plus OxiClean Odor Blasters	55	$14	166 oz.	11¢	🔼	➖	➖	🔽	➖	🔽	🔽	🔼	🔽	
Dreft Pure Gentleness	55	$17	92 oz.	27¢	🔼	➖	➖	⏬	🔼	🔽	🔼	🔼	➖	●
Tide PurClean	54	$16	69 oz.	33¢	🔼	➖	➖	🔽	➖	🔽	➖	🔼	🔽	
Great Value (Walmart) Original Clean Ultimate Fresh HE	54	$27	170 oz.	25¢	🔼	➖	🔽	🔽	➖	🔽	🔽	🔼	➖	
Cheer Colorguard	53	$16	154 oz.	15¢	🔼	➖	➖	➖	➖	🔽	🔽	🔼	🔽	
Dreft Newborn Eco Box	53	$21	105 oz.	22¢	🔼	➖	➖	🔽	➖	🔽	🔼	🔼	➖	

Brand + Product	Overall Score	Pricing			Test Results									
		Per package	Package size	Price per load	Body oil	Dirt	Salad dressing	Coffee	Chocolate	Grass	Blood	Pretreat	Hard water	For sensitive skin
LIQUIDS *Continued*														
Tide Simply Odor Rescue	52	$27	115 oz.	36¢										
Seventh Generation Clean with Purpose Free & Clear	48	$15	40 oz.	28¢										●
Tide Simply All in One	48	$22	184 oz.	17¢										
Ariel Ultra Concentrated	45	$11	92 oz.	17¢										
Era Active Stainfighter	43	$14	154 oz.	13¢										
Purex 4 in 1 Mountain Breeze	43	$12	150 oz.	10¢										
Arm & Hammer Clean Burst	41	$10	105 oz.	10¢										
Purex Natural Elements	40	$10	150 oz.	9¢										
Arm & Hammer Sensitive Skin Free of Perfumes & Dyes	40	$10	105 oz.	10¢										●
Xtra Plus OxiClean	37	$14	192 oz.	13¢										
Gain Original Liquid	36	$19	184 oz.	15¢										
Era 3X Oxibooster	34	$14	154 oz.	16¢										
PODS/PACKS														
Tide Plus Hygienic Clean Heavy Duty 10X Power Pods	78	$20	45 ct.	44¢								NA		
Tide Plus Ultra Oxi with Odor Eliminators Power Pods	74	$27	63 ct.	43¢								NA		
Tide Plus Hygienic Clean 10X Heavy Duty Power Pods Free/Nature	71	$36	63 ct.	57¢								NA		●
Tide Pods Ultra Oxi 4in1	70	$16	43 ct.	37¢								NA		
Tide Power Pods Febreeze Odor Eliminators + Lasting Freshness	70	$28	63 ct.	44¢								NA		
Gain Flings	67	$28	112 ct.	25¢								NA		
Tide Pods Plus Downy 4 in 1	65	$24	61 ct.	39¢								NA		
Kirkland Signature (Costco) Ultra Clean Premium Laundry Detergent Pacs	63	$23	152 ct.	15¢								NA		
Persil Ultra Pacs Everyday Clean Original	59	$13	42 ct.	31¢								NA		
Seventh Generation Free & Clear Packs Sensitive Skin	55	$14	45 ct.	31¢								NA		●
All Mighty Pacs Oxi Free & Clear	53	$21	56 ct.	38¢								NA		●
Great Value (Walmart) Original Clean Ultimate Fresh Pacs	53	$11	60 ct.	18¢								NA		
All Fresh+Clean Oxi Plus Odor Lifters Mighty Pacs	51	$20	60 ct.	33¢								NA		
Amazon Basics Laundry Detergent Pacs	41	$26	120 ct.	22¢								NA		
Arm & Hammer Plus OxiClean 5-in-1 Power Paks	33	$10	42 ct.	24¢								NA		

Laundry Detergents

Brand + Product	Overall Score	Pricing			Test Results									
		Per package	Package size	Price per load	Body oil	Dirt	Salad dressing	Coffee	Chocolate	Grass	Blood	Pretreat	Hard water	For sensitive skin
SHEETS/STRIPS														
Earth Breeze Liquidless Eco Sheets	29	$16	30 ct.	27¢	⌄	!	⌄	⌄⌄	⌄	⌄	⌄⌄	NA	⌄	
Arm & Hammer Power Sheets	29	$15	50 ct.	30¢	⌄	⌄	⌄	⌄⌄	!	⌄⌄	⌄	NA	⌄	
Sheets Liquidless Laundry Detergent Sheets	26	$17	50 ct.	34¢	⌄	⌄	⌄	⌄⌄	⌄	⌄	⌄⌄	NA	⌄	
Carbona Laundry Detergent Sheets Free & Clear	24	$11	25 ct.	44¢	⌄	⌄⌄	⌄	⌄⌄	!	⌄⌄	!	NA	⌄	●
Ecos Liquidless Laundry Detergent Squares	22	$16	64 ct.	25¢	⌄⌄	⌄	⌄	⌄⌄	⌄	⌄⌄	⌄	NA	⌄	●
Kind Laundry Laundry Detergent Sheets	19	$25	60 ct.	42¢	⌄	⌄	⌄	⌄⌄	⌄	⌄	⌄⌄	NA	⌄	
Kind Laundry Laundry Detergent Sheets Fragrance Free	19	$22	60 ct.	37¢	⌄	⌄⌄	⌄	⌄⌄	!	⌄⌄	⌄	NA	⌄	●
Ecowise Clean Laundry Detergent Sheets	19	$8	100 ct.	8¢	⌄⌄	⌄	⌄	⌄⌄	⌄	⌄⌄	⌄	NA	⌄	
Lazy Coconuts Eco-friendly Detergent Strips	15	$15	48 ct.	31¢	⌄⌄	⌄⌄	⌄⌄	⌄⌄	⌄	⌄⌄	⌄	NA	⌄	●
Beyond Laundry Detergent Strips	14	$8	32 ct.	25¢	⌄⌄	⌄⌄	⌄⌄	⌄⌄	!	⌄⌄	⌄	NA	⌄	
Tru Earth Eco Strips	11	$13	32 ct.	41¢	⌄⌄	⌄⌄	⌄	⌄⌄	⌄	⌄⌄	⌄	NA	⌄	

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on the results of all our tests. For our performance tests, we wash a load of clothing containing fabric swatches stained with body oil, coffee, blood and other hard-to-remove substances in two identical machines using cool water. We then air-dry the swatches and use a colorimeter to see how much of the stain was removed from each swatch. We test liquid detergents only as a pretreatment directly on stains.

TOP PICKS

Laundry Detergents

BUDGET-FRIENDLY UNSCENTED LIQUID

Kirkland Signature (Costco) Ultra Clean Free & Clear
$20 for 194 oz.

69 OVERALL SCORE

This liquid cleans most tough stains very well and costs far less than our other top-rated products.

TOP PODS

Tide Plus Hygienic Clean Heavy Duty 10X Power PODS
$20 for 45 pods

78 OVERALL SCORE

These pods breeze through most tough stains and clean well in hard water, too.

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS

WORSE ⌄⌄ ⌄ ! ^ ^^ BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED

ROAD REPORT

NEWS & EXPERT ADVICE TO KEEP YOU AHEAD OF THE CURVE™

FIRST DRIVE

Mini Cooper

The two- and four-door Coopers have been redesigned for 2025 with a minimalist interior. The base model and sportier Cooper S have turbocharged four-cylinder engines, both with a seven-speed automatic transmission.
CR'S TAKE The 201-hp Cooper S we're testing has agile handling, a spirited powertrain (despite initial hesitation), and a stiff ride. The interior is dominated by a quirky circular center screen. Still, the Cooper remains a fun-to-drive small car with a big personality.

BASE PRICE RANGE $28,950-$39,500
DESTINATION CHARGE $995
PRICE AS DRIVEN $36,995

ASK OUR EXPERTS

Should I replace a windshield that has a tiny chip in it?

Even minor damage to your windshield can lead to **larger cracks** eventually. So chips should be repaired immediately, says John Ibbotson, chief mechanic at CR's Auto Test Center. "You can get one repaired at an auto glass repair center—or fix it yourself with **a $20 kit,**" Ibbotson says. One caveat: A chip or crack within the driver's direct line of sight is a **serious safety concern,** and a windshield with one should be replaced. If your car insurance includes comprehensive coverage, you can often get the windshield replaced for free.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

$120

The median amount saved on annual insurance premiums by those who opted into a "telematics" program, which monitors driving behavior and mileage. Only 4 percent said using telematics caused their premiums to go up.

Source: CR's 2024 Auto Insurance Survey of 40,566 U.S. adults.

RECALL

Ram

Ram is recalling over 1.2 million 1500 pickup trucks from the 2019 and 2021 to 2024 model years because the antilock brake system software may cause its electronic stability control system to stop working. ESC uses software, sensors, and brakes to prevent a vehicle from skidding. A problem with the ABS system could cause a crash.
WHAT TO DO Ram dealerships will update the ABS module software free of charge. For more information, call Ram customer service at 800-853-1403.

SHOP SMART

If you're looking to buy a used car, steer clear of dealerships that won't let you get the car inspected.

CR's advice has long been to have a used car you're interested in buying inspected by a mechanic you trust. But some dealerships refuse inspections. "If that happens to you, don't buy the car unless the dealer offers a money-back guarantee," says John Ibbotson, chief mechanic at CR's Auto Test Center. CarMax, for example, which doesn't allow presale inspections, does offer a 10-day warranty, during which time you can get the car checked by a mechanic and return it for a full refund if significant problems are found. Ibbotson says you can also ask the dealership whether it'll allow you to bring a mechanic to the lot to inspect the car.

PHOTO: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

Tires That Last the Longest

Our tests reveal the ones that deliver the best projected tread life without sacrificing performance or safety.

by Jeff S. Bartlett

TIRES ARE a vital investment in your car—and a pricey one, too. On average, Consumer Reports members spent $223 per tire, according to our latest survey. But the real value of that purchase depends on how long the tires last before they're so worn they need to be replaced. After all, the longer a tire's lifespan, the less it costs per mile to use.

Ideally, you want to find tires that are long-lasting while also possessing other important attributes, like dry and wet grip, ride comfort, and quietness. The good news is that for many drivers it's possible to find tires that strike that balance, says Ryan Pszczolkowski, CR's tire program manager. In addition, there are things you can do to prolong the life of your tires, no matter which ones you buy.

When shopping for tires, you'll find the treadwear rating—a number indicating the tire's predicted longevity—on the sidewall, the smooth section of rubber between the tread and the rim. The higher the number, the longer the tire should last (a tire with a treadwear rating of 200 should last twice as long as a tire rated at 100). But those treadwear numbers come from the manufacturer and are influenced by marketing decisions. And they don't actually tell you how many miles you will get.

Consumer Reports conducts its own tests so that you can accurately compare treadwear across brands and tire types. We put tires through rigorous on-road evaluations, with testers driving on them 1,000 miles per day for 16 days. The service life of the tires—when the tread is worn down to 2/32 of an inch—is predicted based on measured wear. These projections, provided in our ratings, are based on proper tire maintenance. Of course, your results will also depend on how you drive, where you drive, what you drive, how you maintain your vehicle, plus your luck with avoiding flat tires. (Winter/snow tires, which use more pliable, faster-wearing rubber that stays grippy in cold weather, are not tested for treadwear.)

What our tests show: The lifespan of tires varies widely. Some tires will last 45,000 miles, while others in the same category can go for 100,000 miles. What makes one tire last twice as long as another is often a matter of materials. As with winter/snow tires, performance tires for sports and luxury cars are made from rubber compounds with exceptional traction and responsiveness—traits that inherently lead them to wear down more quickly than conventional all-season tires. Long-lasting, high-treadwear tires—ones that don't make you sacrifice other qualities like grip and ride comfort—are typically made by blending expensive materials such as silica and a petroleum product called carbon black into the rubber. That chemistry, along with highly engineered tread patterns, helps the tires wear down more slowly.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

TOP-RATED TIRES

ALL-SEASON CAR
Michelin Defender2
100,000 Miles
68 OVERALL SCORE

ALL-SEASON SUV
Michelin CrossClimate2
95,000 Miles
78 OVERALL SCORE

ALL-SEASON TRUCK
Continental TerrainContact H/T
70,000 Miles
67 OVERALL SCORE

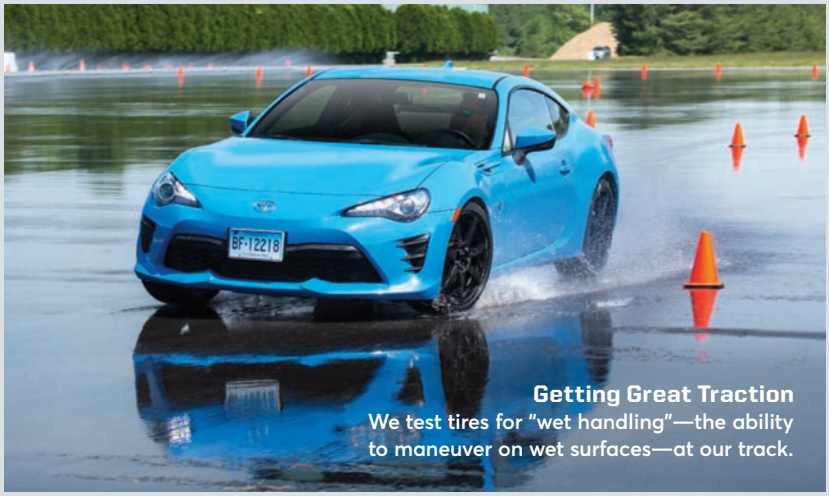
ALL-TERRAIN TRUCK
Continental TerrainContact A/T
65,000 Miles
63 OVERALL SCORE

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED

These tires do cost more to produce and, consequently, to purchase–expect to pay $25 to $50 more per tire than you would for typical tires. Nevertheless, CR's testing shows that spending more up front can be a better overall value.

For example, we paid $254 per tire for the top-rated Michelin CrossClimate2 all-season tires for the 18-inch size we tested, which our results project to last 95,000 miles for a cost of 26.7 cents per mile. Compare that with $184 per tire for the second-ranked Vredestein HiTrac, which we predict to last for 60,000 miles for a cost of 30.7 cents per mile. That extra 35,000 miles of life makes the higher price of the Michelin tires worth it over the lifetime of the tire.

To help you find a set of tires that will give you excellent overall performance along with long-term value, we've translated our test results into the ratings charts found on the following pages. To find a long-lasting tire for your vehicle, scan the recommended models for each category–such as all-season or SUV all-season–and look for a high tested tread life mileage.



Getting Great Traction
We test tires for "wet handling"—the ability to maneuver on wet surfaces—at our track.

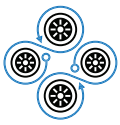
Drive Smoothly to Save Money

Buying tires rated to last a long time isn't the only way to avoid frequent trips to the tire shop. There are also ways to drive and to maintain your tires that will extend their longevity.

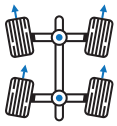
Chief among them: "Don't abuse your tires," says Gordon Gingras, Consumer Reports' automotive engineer. When possible, avoid extreme acceleration, braking, and cornering. These three dynamic actions wear down tread. This is

MAKE YOUR TIRES LAST EVEN LONGER

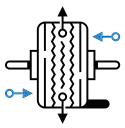
MONITOR THE PRESSURE
Tires lose pressure over time, and not having the right pressure can speed wear and hurt performance. Check the pressure once a month, after the car has been sitting for a while, comparing the number with the pressure recommended in the owner's manual.



ROTATE THE TIRES REGULARLY
Having a mechanic move the tires to different positions on the vehicle—for example, from front to rear—can ensure they wear evenly. Manufacturers usually recommend rotation every 5,000 to 10,000 miles. Check your manual for specifics.



CHECK THE ALIGNMENT
Properly aligned wheels can help reduce tire wear. Have an alignment done every time you buy a set of tires, if your car is pulling to one side, if your steering wheel isn't centered when the wheels are pointing straight ahead, or if you notice uneven wear on the tires.



GET TIRES BALANCED
When you get new tires installed, mechanics ensure that they spin smoothly by adding wheel weights to make corrections. If you notice your car shaking or vibrating, bring it to the shop to have the balance checked.

ICONS BY TIM BOELAARS

particularly a concern with high-performance vehicles, whose powerful engines can invite playful driving.

It may seem obvious, but watch out for potholes and other big road bumps or gullies (navigation apps like Waze can often warn you of their presence). Impacts can harm not only your tires but also the wheels and suspension. "Tires can sustain internal structural damage that you can't see by simply looking at them," says CR's Pszczolkowski. "The tire may hold air and look fine, but after a really hard pothole strike, it's worth it to have a professional inspect your tires and wheels for damage that warrants tire replacement or wheel repair."

With potholes, avoid the instinctive response to swerve around them, because overlapping another lane can lead to other risks. Often, moving slightly to the side within your lane can allow the car to straddle the hole.

The Extended-Warranty Question

Choosing a tire with a warranty brings protection against manufacturer defects and sometimes covers tread life. To take advantage of a tread life warranty, owners typically have to document that they were diligent with tire rotations–see "Make Your Tires Last Even Longer," on the facing page, for maintenance tips–so keep any paperwork you get from the tire shop.

Because the greater threat to tires is more often punctures and potholes, and given the high costs for replacement, our experts say it is worth getting a road hazard warranty. This is often included in the purchase or it can be bought as an add-on. (Many major tire retailers, such as BJ's, Costco, and Tire Rack, include a road hazard warranty as a free perk.) This coverage can be especially useful if you have had flat tires before, a sign that your routes put you at an elevated risk.

WHERE TO BUY GREAT TIRES

In 2023, we collected responses from 16,899 Consumer Reports members who purchased new tires within a 12-month period. In general, the survey respondents were satisfied with their purchase and installation experience at national auto repair chains, independent retailers, big-box stores, and warehouse clubs. But there were some significant differences between the highest- and lowest-ranked shops. Just one retailer, Les Schwab Tire Centers, serving 13 states in the western region, stood out for top-tier overall satisfaction. Independent retailers hold second place in the rankings, showing that local businesses often outperform national brands.

Sixteen retailers provided an above-average experience, leaving nine rated as average. The lowest-ranked retailers were Mavis Discount Tire, Pep Boys, and Walmart.

Car dealerships also had a strong showing, making them a convenient and satisfying choice. However, members reported prices at dealerships were among the highest in the survey.

Wherever you choose to go for service, our experts recommend calling ahead or ordering online to save time: No retailer earned the highest rating for brand and model selection or for having the desired model in stock.

For complete and detailed ratings, go to **CR.org/tireretailers**.

Tire Retailer	Overall Satisfaction Score
Les Schwab Tire Centers	83
Independent retailers	80
Discount Tire/ Tirerack.com	79
America's Tire	79
Discount Tire Centers	76
Belle Tire Distributors	75
Costco	74
Sullivan Tire	74
Kal Tire	74
Car dealerships	72
Goodyear Auto Service	71
Big O Tires	67
Tire Discounters	67

Tire Retailer	Overall Satisfaction Score
Amazon	64
BJ's	63
Sam's Club	62
Firestone Complete Auto Care	62
Tire Kingdom	60
NTB Tire & Service Centers	57
Tire Plus	55
Town Fair Tire Centers	53
Mr. Tire	53
Canadian Tire	52
Mavis Discount Tire	47
Pep Boys	43
Walmart	42

HOW WE TEST: Scores are based on ratings from 16,899 Consumer Reports members' experiences of buying and installing new tires from a retailer between fall 2022 and fall 2023. The **Overall Satisfaction Score** is derived from CR members' ratings of tire retailers and installers on a series of attributes. Ratings reflect the experiences of CR members, who may not be representative of the general U.S. population.

HOW WE RATE TIRES

Every year, Consumer Reports reviews more than 40 tire models. This means we purchase hundreds of individual tires to put through all of our tests. We change those tires so often that we often wear out the studs that hold the wheels in place.

We test the tires for wet and dry braking, handling, ride comfort, quietness, and resistance to hydroplaning—when water gets between the tire and the pavement, causing loss of control. Our technicians use an array of test equipment to precisely measure the tires' performance throughout these challenges.

Except for summer-specific tires, we perform our snow-traction tests at our Auto Test Center in Connecticut and in northern Michigan, to assess how well the tires grip in packed snow. To ensure we have a smooth and consistent surface for our ice-braking tests, we drive on a skating rink.

We also commission outside labs to measure each tire's rolling resistance, which affects fuel economy. Our 16,000-mile treadwear tests are conducted on public roads in western Texas.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results	Test Results										
					Three-Season Driving				Winter Driving		Comfort		
			Owner satisfaction	Tested tread life, miles	Dry braking	Wet braking	Handling	Hydroplaning	Snow traction	Ice braking	Ride	Noise	Rolling resistance
ALL-SEASON TIRES													
Michelin Defender2	68	$189	⌃⌃	100,000	⌃	○	○	⌃	⌃	○	○	⌃	⌃
Hankook Kinergy XP	68	$153	⌄	75,000	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	○	○	⌃	⌃
Vredestein Quatrac Pro+ [1]	67	$144	⌃⌃	60,000	⌃	○	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃
Michelin Primacy Tour A/S	66	$215	⌃⌃	60,000	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	○	○	⌃	⌃	⌃
Continental TrueContact Tour54	65	$172	⌃	75,000	⌃	○	⌃	○	⌃	○	⌃	⌃	⌃
Bridgestone Turanza QuietTrack	65	$233	○	70,000	⌃	○	⌃	⌃	⌃	○	⌃	⌃	⌃
Pirelli P7 AS Plus 3	65	$169	○	70,000	⌃	○	⌃	⌃	⌃	○	○	⌃	⌃
Nokian Remedy WRG5 [1]	64	$185	○	50,000	⌃	○	○	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃
General Altimax RT45	63	$159	○	65,000	⌃	○	○	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃
Yokohama Avid Ascend GT	63	$169	○	70,000	⌃	○	⌃	⌃	⌃	○	⌃	⌃	⌃
Kumho Solus TA51A	62	$160	○	60,000	⌃	○	⌃	○	⌃	○	○	⌃	⌃
Falken Aklimate [1]	60	$167	○	60,000	⌃	○	○	⌃	⌃	○	⌃	○	⌃
Cooper ProControl	59	$149	○	75,000	⌃	○	⌃	⌃	○	⌄	○	⌃	⌃
Uniroyal Tiger Paw Touring A/S	59	$147	⌄⌄	70,000	⌃	○	⌃	⌃	○	○	○	⌃	○
Kenda Vezda Touring 4S [1]	59	$137	–	50,000	⌃	○	○	○	⌃	⌃	○	⌃	○
ALL-SEASON SUV TIRES													
Michelin CrossClimate2 [1]	78	$254	⌃⌃	95,000	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃
Vredestein HiTrac	73	$184	⌃⌃	60,000	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	○	⌃	⌃
Pirelli Scorpion AS Plus 3	70	$205	○	85,000	⌃	○	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	○	⌃	⌃⌃
Goodyear Assurance ComfortDrive	66	$223	○	75,000	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	○	○	○	⌃⌃	○
Continental CrossContact LX25	66	$219	⌃	75,000	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	○	⌃⌃	○

[1] All-weather tires.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results	Test Results									
					Three-Season Driving				Winter Driving		Comfort		
			Owner satisfaction	Tested tread life, miles	Dry braking	Wet braking	Handling	Hydroplaning	Snow traction	Ice braking	Ride	Noise	Rolling resistance
ALL-SEASON SUV TIRES *Continued*													
Yokohama Geolandar CV G058	64	$200		70,000									
Nexen Roadian GTX	62	$155		50,000									
Nokian One	61	$211		60,000									
Falken Ziex CT60 A/S	59	$196		60,000									
ALL-SEASON TRUCK TIRES													
✓ **Continental** TerrainContact H/T	67	$194		70,000									
✓ **General** Grabber HTS60	62	$201		55,000									
✓ **Vredestein** Pinza HT	61	$181		55,000									
✓ **Firestone** Destination LE3	59	$209		60,000									
Hankook Dynapro HT	57	$195		65,000									
Falken Wildpeak H/T02	56	$219		45,000									
Nexen Roadian HTX2	56	$199		60,000									
Maxxis Razr HT	56	$189	–	60,000									
Kumho Crugen HT51	56	$185		60,000									
Goodyear Wrangler Steadfast HT	56	$213		55,000									
ALL-TERRAIN TRUCK TIRES													
✓ **Continental** TerrainContact A/T	63	$269		65,000									
✓ **Michelin** LTX A/T2	63	$277		80,000									
✓ **Vredestein** Pinza AT	59	$179		60,000									
✓ **Hankook** Dynapro AT2 Xtreme	56	$211		70,000									
✓ **Bridgestone** Dueler A/T Revo 3	56	$249		50,000									
✓ **Goodyear** Wrangler All-Terrain Adventure	55	$232		50,000									
✓ **Nexen** Roadian ATX	55	$208		55,000									
✓ **Firestone** Destination A/T2	55	$232		60,000									
✓ **Toyo** Open Country A/T III	55	$248		65,000									
Kumho Road Venture AT52	55	$189		60,000									
ULTRA-HIGH-PERFORMANCE ALL-SEASON TIRES													
✓ **Michelin** Pilot Sport All Season 4	73	$189		60,000									
✓ **BFGoodrich** g-Force Comp-2 A/S Plus	73	$159		60,000									
✓ **Vredestein** Hypertrac All Season	70	$146		60,000									

WORSE — BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results	Test Results									
					Three-Season Driving				Winter Driving		Comfort		
			Owner satisfaction	Tested tread life, miles	Dry braking	Wet braking	Handling	Hydroplaning	Snow traction	Ice braking	Ride	Noise	Rolling resistance
ULTRA-HIGH-PERFORMANCE ALL-SEASON TIRES *Continued*													
✓ **Continental** ExtremeContact DWS06 Plus	70	$158	▲	60,000	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	●	▼▼
Yokohama Advan Sport A/S+	66	$131	●	65,000	▲▲	●	●	▲	●	▲	●	▲	▼
General G-Max AS-05	65	$149	●	55,000	▲	●	▲	▲	●	▲	▼	▲	▼
Goodyear Eagle Exhilarate	65	$183	●	40,000	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▼	▲	▼▼
WINTER/SNOW TIRES													
✓ **Nokian** Hakkapeliitta R5	75	$189	▲▲	NA	●	▼	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	●	●	▲▲
✓ **Continental** VikingContact 7	71	$203	●	NA	●	▼	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲
✓ **Michelin** X-Ice Snow	71	$189	▲▲	NA	●	▼	▼	●	▲▲	▲▲	●	●	▲▲
✓ **Bridgestone** Blizzak WS90	69	$169	▲▲	NA	▲	▼	▼	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲	●	●
✓ **Toyo** Observe GSi-6	65	$166	▲	NA	●	▼	▼	●	▲▲	▲	●	▲	▲
✓ **General** Altimax Arctic 12	64	$168	●	NA	●	▼	●	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲	▲
✓ **Nexen** Winguard Winspike 3	64	$159	▼▼	NA	●	▼	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▼	▲
Falken Winterpeak F-Ice 1	63	$139	●	NA	●	▼▼	▼	▲	▲▲	▲	●	●	●
PERFORMANCE WINTER/SNOW TIRES													
✓ **Bridgestone** Blizzak LM005	75	$278	▲▲	NA	▲	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	●
✓ **Hankook** Winter I*cept Evo3	75	$203	●	NA	●	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	▼
✓ **Vredestein** Wintrac Pro	74	$179	▲▲	NA	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▼
✓ **Michelin** Pilot Alpin PA4	74	$229	▲▲	NA	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▼
Falken Eurowinter HS01	72	$139	●	NA	▲	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	●	▼
WINTER/SNOW TRUCK TIRES													
✓ **Nokian** Hakkapeliitta R5 SUV	75	$246	▲▲	NA	●	▼	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	●	●	▲▲
✓ **GT Radial** IcePro SUV3	71	$155	–	NA	▲	●	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	●	●	▲▲
✓ **Bridgestone** Blizzak DM-V2	68	$194	▲▲	NA	●	▼▼	▼	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲
✓ **Nexen** Winguard Winspike 3	65	$169	▼▼	NA	▲	▼	▼	●	▲▲	▲▲	●	▼	▲
✓ **General** Grabber Arctic	65	$185	●	NA	●	▼▼	▼	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲	▲

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at **CR.org/tires.** Find the right tires for your car, SUV, or truck.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on a dozen tests, with most weight given to braking, handling, hydroplaning resistance, and tread life. **Price** is approximate retail for the tested size. **Owner satisfaction** is based on the proportion of members who would definitely purchase the same tire brand again. A gray dash (–) indicates insufficient data. **Tested tread life** is projected from a 16,000-mile vehicle test run on public roads in Texas. **Braking** tests on ice are from 10 mph; on dry and wet pavement, from 60 to 0 mph. **Handling** combines how well a tire performed in the wet-handling test, steering feel, and an emergency handling maneuver. **Hydroplaning** resistance denotes a tire's ability to resist skimming along the surface of standing water. **Snow traction** tests denote how far a vehicle has to travel to accelerate from 5 to 20 mph on moderately packed snow. **Ride** and **noise** are evaluated subjectively on rough and smooth roads. **Rolling resistance,** as measured by a dynamometer, is a factor in fuel economy.

▼▼ ▼ ● ▲ ▲▲ WORSE — BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED

Protect Yourself on the Road

BY BENJAMIN PRESTON

DEFENSIVE DRIVING is a kind of superpower. All you need to harness it are a few basic skills. With practice, you'll be better equipped to handle inclement weather, debris on the road, and other drivers' dangerous behaviors—such as speeding and driving distracted or impaired, all of which cause millions of crashes in the U.S. each year.

"The key to being a defensive driver is being hyperaware of your surroundings and laser-focused on driving," says Michael Crossen, driving instructor and lead automotive technician at Consumer Reports. "By anticipating what's likely to happen, you can make quick decisions that will keep you safe and help you avoid the cost and hassle of crash repairs."

Motor vehicle crashes are a persistent problem in the U.S. They cost tens of thousands of lives and hundreds of billions of dollars annually. Defensive driving can help you avoid adding another collision to those statistics. The biggest part is learning how to stay out of harm's way to begin with. Learn how to do it by following a few basic tips from CR's experts.

LOOK AHEAD

Keep your eyes peeled for cyclists, pedestrians, or potential hazards in your path: debris, stopped cars, animals, anything that could cause you to change course suddenly. By scanning ahead, you increase the amount of time you have to react. Avoiding the urge to tailgate will also provide more reaction time. Crossen suggests leaving an interval of at least 3 seconds between your car and the one ahead. To check your following distance, begin counting when the car ahead passes a signpost or other fixed object and stop counting when your car passes the same point. "More space means more reaction time," Crossen says.

MANAGE YOUR SPEED

Wet, snowy, icy, or otherwise slick road surfaces, as well as heavy wind gusts, can make staying in your lane a challenge. "The best way to adapt to these situations is to lower your speed," Crossen says. "The same thing goes for heavy traffic. When conditions are less than ideal, avoid the urge to drive faster, even if you're in a rush." It also helps to drive in a way that enables other motorists to predict your next move: Use your turn signals, and be smooth when you accelerate, stop, change lanes, or turn. This gives everyone around you plenty of time to react to your actions, reducing the chances of a crash.

PASS ON THE LEFT

You've seen the road signs: "Slower traffic keep right." Resist the urge to hang out in the left lane. If you need to pass someone when you're driving on a limited-access highway, use the left lane for momentary passing and the right lane (or lanes) for sustained travel. When you're done passing and you're clear of the car you've passed, signal and return to the center or right-hand lane. Staying in the left lane too long blocks motorists who may also want to pass, which can create congestion and lead frustrated drivers to make unsafe lane changes. Some states have laws against sitting in the left lane and blocking traffic.

AVOID ERRATIC DRIVERS

If you see a car swerving, braking and accelerating suddenly, or doing anything else unsafe—either in front of you or to the rear—stay away. The person behind the wheel could be intoxicated, falling asleep, or having a medical or psychological emergency. "Whatever the reason, you want to stay as far away from an inconsistent driver as you safely can," Crossen says. "If their movements aren't predictable, there's a chance that a sudden jerk of the wheel or stab of the brake pedal could cause a crash." For especially dangerous situations, find a safe spot to pull over, and call 911 to report the erratic driver.

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

MIDSIZED SUVs

Lexus GX550

Better Off-Road Than On

65
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 62

HIGHS Powerful engine, high-quality cabin materials, off-road ability

LOWS Jiggly ride, cumbersome handling, mediocre fuel economy, lots of wind noise

POWERTRAIN 349-hp, 3.4-liter twin-turbocharged V6 engine; 10-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive

FUEL 18 mpg on premium

PRICE $62,900-$79,900 base price + $1,350 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $71,610

BY MIKE MONTICELLO

WHILE THE PREVIOUS GX balanced luxury and off-road prowess in equal measure, the redesigned GX550 is more focused on the dirt road less traveled. That means the new TX, which we previously tested, is actually the smarter choice for most shoppers seeking a three-row SUV from Lexus. Compared with the TX, the GX has a rough ride, cumbersome handling, and a loud cabin that's a challenge to get into and out of.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

A stout 349-hp, 3.4-liter turbocharged V6 linked to a smooth-shifting 10-speed automatic provides the GX with plenty of acceleration. It pulls hard for such a heavy vehicle, with abundant low-end torque. But from a standstill, that power can come on abruptly, and there's a notable delay when accelerating from a rolling stop. The V6 also sends some vibrations through the steering wheel that weren't there with the old V8. Wind noise intrudes heavily on the highway as the blocky SUV punches through the air.

Like the previous GX, there's a full-time four-wheel-drive system and a low-range gear set to help handle hardcore off-road situations. It climbed up the challenging rock hill at our test track like a mountain goat. On-road handling, however, is downright clumsy, with slow steering and significant body roll through corners. It managed a dismal speed of only 47.5 mph through our avoidance-maneuver test. Although the ride initially feels absorbent, the GX becomes unsettled and jiggly on even slightly rough roads and tends to rock occupants back and forth.

CABIN COMFORT

Most interior materials are soft or have a premium feel, but there's a utilitarian vibe to the GX's cabin that lacks the panache expected at this price. The mildly bolstered front seats deliver a good balance of support and comfort, though it's surprising that our Premium+ tested vehicle has only two-way lumbar adjustment.

The second-row bench seat is flat and not that comfortable. Headroom is plentiful, but the bottom cushion is short on underleg support. No adult will want to go for more than a short jaunt in the supertight third-row seat (pictured above).

CONTROLS AND USABILITY

As with other recent Lexus models, most controls are easy to use. But the infotainment system lacks a home screen, which forces extra searching around on the display. Wading through the driver's screen menus is also confusing, and the temperature controls are finicky. Sometimes turning the knob one or two clicks accomplishes nothing.

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

EXCLUSIVE RATINGS & REVIEWS
BASED ON TESTING AT CR'S
327-ACRE AUTO TEST CENTER
–Mike Monticello

ELECTRIC SUVs

Honda Prologue

A Modest First EV Effort

56
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 72

HIGHS Smooth acceleration, roomy interior, easy to get into and out of, competitive driving range and home-charging speed, qualifies for $7,500 federal tax credit

LOWS Short on handling agility, stiff ride, long stopping distances

POWERTRAIN 288-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct drive; all-wheel drive

RANGE 277 miles

PRICE $47,400-$57,900 base price + $1,395 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $56,550

WITH HELP FROM General Motors, Honda finally has a mass-market electric vehicle. The Prologue is based on the Chevrolet Blazer EV, and Honda's fast way into producing its first mainstream EV has delivered mixed results. On the one hand, the Prologue has smooth and quiet power, a normal-feeling brake pedal, and a fairly long driving range. Unlike the Blazer, it also comes with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay. Yet the Prologue has some of the same drawbacks as the Blazer EV: lethargic steering, compromised outward views, and front seats that are short on support.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

As is typical of EVs, the Prologue's 288 hp makes for smooth takeoffs. Its 6.2-second 0-to-60-mph time is about a second slower than most competitors, and the EV feels a bit lazy if you need a burst of speed on the highway.

We don't like the fact that adjusting the car's regenerative-braking levels requires multiple steps within the infotainment screen. Hyundai and Kia EVs, for example, use paddles behind the steering wheel. The Prologue managed a competitive 277 miles during our 70-mph highway-range test. An 11.5-kW onboard charger allows relatively quick home charging, adding 32 miles of range per hour.

The Prologue exhibits minimal body roll through corners, but the vague steering telegraphs little to the driver about tire grip. The steering response is also notably slow, which is odd for a Honda. The ride is rather stiff, with bumps and other road imperfections coming through into the cabin in a more pronounced way than they should.

CABIN COMFORT

The front seats have a flat shape that doesn't hold you in place very well, particularly the bottom cushion. The driving position, though, is well-designed. There's abundant headroom, a wide left footrest, and a clear view of the gauges through the wheel. The rear seats have plenty of space, but they're flat with hardly any contouring. The anchors at the base of the seatback for a child car seat protrude enough to further compromise comfort.

CONTROLS AND USABILITY

The Prologue may disappoint brand loyalists who are used to the look and feel of a typical Honda's interior. The column-mounted gear selector lever and windshield wiper controls are ripped straight from GM's parts bin. Then again, we're happy that the climate system has easy-to-use knobs and buttons. But we don't like that the button for the emergency flashers is out of the driver's line of sight or easy reach, placed high on the overhead console.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

MIDSIZED CARS

Toyota Camry

A Well-Rounded Hybrid Sedan With Superb Fuel Economy

82
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 91

HIGHS Excellent fuel economy, smooth electric power at low speeds

LOWS Gas engine gets noisy when revved, low stance makes it difficult to get into and out of

POWERTRAIN 225-hp, 2.5-liter 4-cylinder hybrid engine; electronic continuously variable transmission; front-wheel drive

FUEL 48 mpg on regular

PRICE $28,400–$36,125 base price + $1,135 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $33,678

LIKE OTHER NEW Toyotas, the redesigned 2025 Camry is now available only as a four-cylinder hybrid. In most ways, though, it has the same qualities that have made the Camry the bestselling sedan in the U.S. for over two decades: a pleasing balance of ride comfort and capable handling, practical interior space, and user-friendly controls. We also like that BSW and RCTW now come standard. The new Camry has remarkable fuel economy, with our SE achieving 48 mpg overall.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

There's more power than in the previous Camry hybrid, and handoffs between gas and electric drivetrains have been further refined. An initial shove from the electric motor makes takeoffs smooth, and the Camry can get up to about 25 mph without waking the gas engine if you drive gently. But hard acceleration causes the engine to rev unpleasantly, sending vibrations through the steering wheel.

We're impressed with the SE's sharp handling. The steering delivers decent feedback to the driver about front-tire grip, and body lean is nicely controlled through turns. The taut suspension is more firm than it is plush, with some harder hits punching through on bumpy roads. Most of the time, though, it feels smooth and comfortable.

We found that the Camry's brakes have a confidence-inspiring feel without the regenerative-braking oddities or low-speed grabbiness that make some hybrids difficult to bring to a stop smoothly.

CABIN COMFORT

The front seat worked well for most of our drivers during short stints, with comfortable padding and ample side bolsters. But the bottom cushion feels thin and support waned on longer drives. The driver benefits from good headroom and well-placed armrests, but those with longer legs said their knees rubbed against the center console and the door. Rear-seat room is competitive among midsized sedans, but headroom is tighter than in the Honda Accord.

Trunk space also isn't as generous as in the Accord. As with most sedans, the Camry's low stance makes it a bit difficult to get into and out of compared with an SUV.

CONTROLS AND USABILITY

Camrys come with wireless Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, along with wireless charging. We like the easy-to-use climate controls, but the instrument screen can be confusing, especially because the driver assistance menu is full of puzzling acronyms without explanations (for example, "PDA" for Toyota's Proactive Driving Assist system).

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

Ratings › **A Wide Range** This month we tested three vastly different vehicles: The off-road-ready Lexus GX550, an all-new electric SUV from Honda, and the popular Toyota Camry.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results										ADAS
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + Finish	Routine handling	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	BSW/RCTW
MIDSIZED SUVs WITH OFF-ROAD CAPABILITY																
✓ **Lexus GX550** 3.4T	65	$71,610	↑	↑	62	18	370	↑ / ↑	–	↑	–	↑↑	↓	7.0	131	S
Jeep Grand Cherokee 4xe 2.0T+E	55	$64,795	↓	–	75	21	25[E] + 400	↑ / ↑	–	↑↑	↑	↑	–	6.1	142	S
Jeep Grand Cherokee L 3.6L	51	$55,265	↓	↓	71	19	445	↑ / ↑	–	↑	↑	↑	–	8.8	141	S
Land Rover Defender 3.0T	47	$70,710	↓	↓	57	18	435	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	–	↑	–	6.9	147	S
Ford Bronco 2.7T	46	$53,505	↓	↑	51	18	385	↑ / –	↑	↓	–	–	–	7.0	149	O
ELECTRIC SUVs																
✓ **Kia EV6**	77	$52,840	–	↑	86	NA	277	↑ / –	–	↑↑	↑	↑	↑↑	4.7	126	S
✓ **Tesla Model Y**	72	$61,190	–	↑	88	NA	330	↑↑ / ↑	↓↓	↑	↓	↑	↑↑	4.7	121	S / –
✓ **Nissan Ariya**	70	$63,020	↑	↑	70	NA	253	↑ / ↑	–	↑	–	↑	↑	5.4	130	S
✓ **Ford Mustang Mach-E**	70	$55,800	–	↑	74	NA	299	↑ / ↑	–	↑↑	–	↑	↑↑	5.3	136	S
Hyundai Ioniq 5	67	$51,020	↓	↑	86	NA	267	↑ / ↑	–	↑↑	↑	↑	↑	4.7	131	S
Subaru Solterra/ Toyota bZ4X	62	$50,432	–	↓	67	NA	210	↑ / –	–	↑	–	↑	↑	6.4	135	S
Volkswagen ID.4	57	$50,870	↓	↓	78	NA	253	↑↑ / ↑	↓↓	↑↑	↑	↑	↑	5.8	134	S
Honda Prologue	56	$56,550	↓	↑	72	NA	277	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	–	↑	↑	6.2	140	S
Chevrolet Blazer EV	56	$60,000	↓	↑	68	NA	275	– / ↑	–	↑	–	↑	↑	6.3	139	S
MIDSIZED CARS																
✓ **Honda Accord Hybrid** 2.0H	89	$32,990	↑	–	96	40	510	– / ↑	↑↑	↑	↑	–	↑	8.0	128	S
✓ **Toyota Camry** 2.5H	82	$33,678	–	↑	91	48	620	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	7.7	132	S
✓ **Honda Accord** 1.5T	78	$30,705	–	↓	85	32	470	– / ↑	↑↑	↑	↑	–	↑	8.0	133	O
✓ **Subaru Legacy** 2.5L	77	$27,609	–	–	89	28	515	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑↑	↑	↑	8.9	131	O
✓ **Kia K5** 2.5L	76	$31,330	–	–	85	31	485	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	8.6	125	S
✓ **Nissan Altima** 2.5L	75	$29,330	–	↓↓	83	31	495	↑ / ↑	↑↑	↑	–	↑	–	7.6	131	S
✓ **Hyundai Sonata** 2.5L	74	$28,615	–	–	83	31	485	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	–	↑	↑	7.5	127	S
✓ **Hyundai Sonata Hybrid** 2.0H	72	$31,915	–	–	81	44	690	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	–	↑	↑	8.0	135	S
Chevrolet Malibu 1.5T	67	$26,790	–	↓	81	29	370	– / ↑	↑↑	↑	↑	–	↑	8.4	130	O

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/cars. When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.

HOW WE TEST: The **Overall Score** combines **road-test results,** survey data for **predicted reliability** and **owner satisfaction**, and **advanced safety,** which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, blind spot warning, and rear cross traffic warning. A dash (–) means no such safety system is offered; O means it's optional on at least some trim levels; S means the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's active driving assistance system has inadequate direct driver monitoring.

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The Better Deal

Many of the products we test at CR earn high ratings for their impressive performance—but some are also a really great value. They have most (if not all) of the attributes of other top-rated products at a much lower price. Check out the deals we found for you this month.

3-ROW SUVs

INFINITI QX60
$49,650-$66,100 **70**

MAZDA CX-90
$37,845-$57,450 **82**

THE BETTER DEAL

THE LOWDOWN

THE THREE-ROW INFINITI QX60 is a refined SUV with a robust powertrain, many standard advanced safety features, and a comfortable ride. The interior feels luxurious, with soft surfaces and contrast stitching on the upholstery. But those premium touches come at a high price. For less money, consider the Mazda CX-90. It's one of the best-handling SUVs on the market, matches the Infiniti's safety features, and has an equally luxe cabin.

2-SLICE TOASTERS

BREVILLE A BIT MORE BTA720XL $90 **92**

THE BETTER DEAL

BEAUTIFUL BY DREW BARRYMORE $40 **91**

THE LOWDOWN

THE TOP TWO MODELS in our ratings, these two-slice toasters are evenly matched. Both reliably toast bread to your preselected shade, have slots wide enough for bagels or frozen waffles, and are easy to use and to clean. The pricey Breville has a stainless steel exterior and an extra feature: If your toast is too light, a touch of the "A Bit More" button will add some extra browning time. The Beautiful by Drew Barrymore model doesn't offer that convenience, but it does have seven doneness settings and it toasts slightly faster than the Breville—for less than half the price.

FIRM LATEX MATTRESSES

ESSENTIA STRATAMI
$3,500 **81**

THE BETTER DEAL

SLEEP ON LATEX PURE GREEN FIRM
$1,000 **81**

THE LOWDOWN

PREFER A FIRM BED? Both of these mattresses are supportive for back and side sleepers of all sizes. The Essentia got slightly higher comfort ratings in our member surveys, and it doesn't retain heat. On the other hand, the Sleep on Latex is a little firmer. If you don't "sleep hot," its much lower price could be your dream come true.

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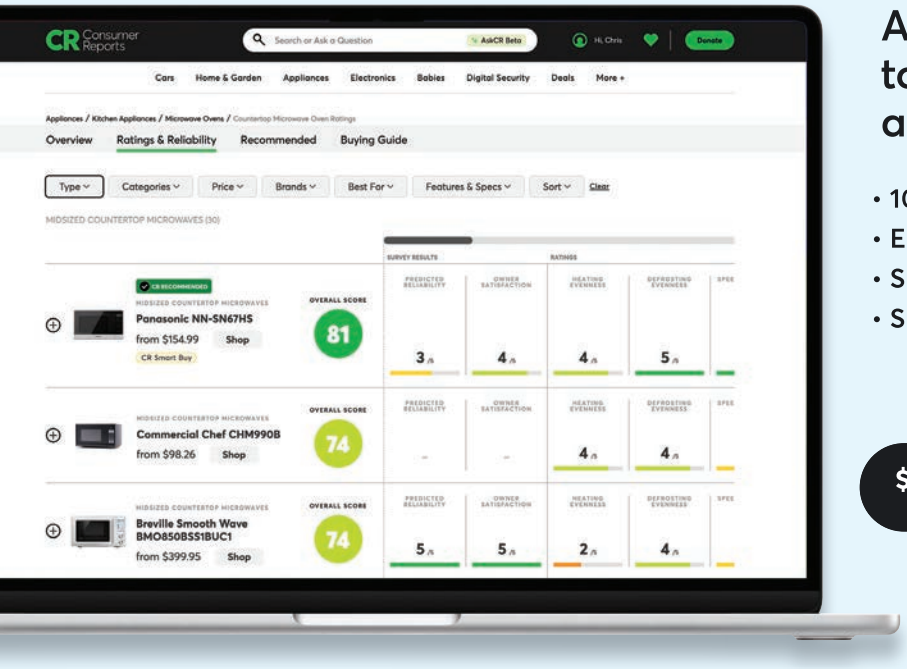

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